

**Literary Criticism as Feminist Argument in Mary  
Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of  
Woman***

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I declare ~~this~~ to be my own original work.

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## Abstract

Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* makes its feminist argument primarily through literary criticism. Recent scholarship has generally considered the literary critical dimension of *Rights of Woman* as a minor component of Wollstonecraft's explicit political argument and cultural critique. This thesis locates and analyzes three literary critiques in *Rights of Woman* in order to illustrate the specificity of Wollstonecraft's methods. Wollstonecraft's critique of Milton utilises a practice of quotation and commentary, and interrogates his prominent role in literary and political canons. Her critique of Rousseau's *Emile* is highly instructive because she both attacks its content and attempts to undercut the modes by which this paradigmatic statement of the submissive domestic female had become 'a prevailing opinion of a sexual character'. Wollstonecraft's critique of John Gregory, the author of the influential conduct book *A Legacy to His Daughters*, claims that this work perpetuates Rousseau's repressive norms, even without the conscious knowledge of its apparently capable author. In doing so, Wollstonecraft theorizes the existence of a self-reproducing 'male' literary tradition, one which comprises a broad range of texts, whether by 'great' writers or less gifted men, a notion which challenges benevolent images of a purist canon of aesthetic value. In the development of her criticism, Wollstonecraft draws from two contemporary critical traditions. The first is that of the bluestocking women, whose public mastery of literary knowledge gives them the status to promulgate social agendas. The second is the literary periodical, which stands at the very centre of print culture in the eighteenth century. A specific analysis of the literary critical dimension of *Rights of Woman* illuminates new aspects of the organization and rhetoric of this key work.

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## Frequently Cited Sources

<i>AnRev</i>	Mary Wollstonecraft, reviews from the <i>Analytical Review</i>
<i>Letters</i>	Mary Wollstonecraft, <i>Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft</i>
<i>NTC</i>	<i>The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism</i>
<i>VRM</i>	Mary Wollstonecraft, <i>A Vindication of the Rights of Men</i>
<i>VRW</i>	Mary Wollstonecraft, <i>A Vindication of the Rights of Woman</i>

## Textual Note

Passages cited from *Rights of Woman* include the chapter numbers in Arabic numerals, first, in order to locate passages for those readers who are using one of the many editions of this work. Second, this illustrates the sequencing of Wollstonecraft's argument. All citations of *Rights of Woman* refer to the complete works edition, edited by Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler. However, in most cases I have preserved the punctuation and capitalization of Wollstonecraft's second edition of 1792 (with her corrections), especially when these elements impact upon meaning. In Chapter 3 I refer to both the modern text of *Emile* translated by Alan Bloom, and William Kenrick's translation of Book 5 of the text, published in 1763, as *Emilius and Sophia*. Kenrick's *Emile* was the most commonly reprinted translation in the eighteenth century and the basis of all of Wollstonecraft's quotations. The terms *Emile* and *Emilius* refer to the Bloom and Kenrick translations respectively.



Frontispiece to vol. 1 of *The Female Spectator* by Eliza Haywood

## Introduction

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In 1787, at the age of 28, Mary Wollstonecraft settled in London and became a literary professional, not only supporting herself, but also assisting family and friends with money and encouragement. Between this time and 10 September 1797, when she died after giving birth to her second daughter, the future writer of *Frankenstein*, Wollstonecraft had extended her sense of justice and advocacy beyond her immediate circle by means of a widely varied body of work. In Wollstonecraft's all too brief career, she wrote hundreds of literary reviews, at least two translations, two novels, some educational literature, an account of the French Revolution, and two political tracts, one vindicating the 'rights of men' and one the 'rights of woman', among other things. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) is a treatise demanding a mutually reinforcing set of reforms. Women are to develop physically and intellectually so that they may fully participate in the public sphere. Conversely, the political and legal structures of the state are to change so as to accommodate active public women. Although she endorses in a general way the division between the domestic and public spheres, Wollstonecraft insists that women participate fully in both these spheres. She asks that traditional roles such as those of mother and wife be re-evaluated so that they are consistent with citizenship, a demand that places her near one extreme of feminist writing of the time.

Wollstonecraft does not only present her platform 'positively', to use the unflattering eighteenth-century term for the discourteous reiteration of one's beliefs, but also makes her central political arguments 'negatively', that is, by analysing obstacles to women's emancipation. This leads her to an analysis of the way in which 'a female character' is shaped through such cultural practices as childrearing, nurse talk, and the imitation of role models, and the way in which 'female manners' are controlled through specific norms of public behaviour, especially verbal expression. Primarily, it is through 'a medium of books', mostly written by men, that women are shaped and controlled, and it is through extended analyses of influential texts that Wollstonecraft makes her fundamental argument against this state of affairs. Wollstonecraft's discussion of a range of topics has led some commentators to call



hers a cultural critique *rather than* a literary critique, a questionable dichotomy; Wollstonecraft sees culture as deeply affected by literary activity.

One cause of this barren blooming I attribute to a false system of education, gathered from the books written on this subject by men [...]. In a treatise, therefore, on female rights and manners, the works which have been particularly written for their improvement most not be overlooked [...]. (VRW Intro.73)

Wollstonecraft insists that works of 'genius' and 'more frivolous productions' are equally responsible for women's subjugation. Wollstonecraft's feminist agenda cuts across literary genres and hierarchies of value by insisting upon explicitly political rather than, say, belletristic criteria by which to judge texts and traditions. Despite the overblown sentiment and laughable prose of *Sermons to Young Women* (1765) and *The Character and Conduct of the female sex* (1776) by John Fordyce, these are analyzed in Chapter 5 of *Rights of Woman* 'because these volumes are so frequently put into the hands of young people' (VRW 5.199). When works such as Milton's *Paradise Lost* or Rousseau's *Emile* are challenged, the former in Chapter 2, and the latter throughout much of *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft's description of the 'eloquence' and 'genius' of these authors is an expression of admiration only in a rhetorical sense, and in fact alerts the reader to their dangerous appeal.

The presence of different genres in *Rights of Woman* has prompted a number of interpretations. Those along historicist lines are I believe the most fruitful. Wollstonecraft's biography has often overshadowed the rhetoric of the text, or has been seen as the cause of its alleged disorganization. Cora Kaplan, in a recent collection of studies, states that Wollstonecraft's writings as a whole present 'an emotional and sexual history whose notoriety has inhibited access to the writing' (247). In 1992 Miriam Brody states that one group of modern critics sees the different styles and genres in *Rights of Woman* as symptoms of Mary Wollstonecraft's troubled consciousness.

Writing about rationality, Wollstonecraft repressed her own sensibility and desire, but these have risen to the surface of the text elliptically, accounting for its apparent disorganization, digressiveness, sporadic examples, apostrophes and outbursts. All of these are the surface rumblings of the author's repression of feeling. (70)



The contextualization of *Rights of Woman* within the ever-growing body of rediscovered women's criticism, and eighteenth-century periodical writing in general, has by now established that the heterogeneity and rhetorical force of this text is an appropriation of contemporary critical styles and not necessarily a symptom of Mary Wollstonecraft's troubled sexuality.<sup>1</sup> More recently, a number of scholars have examined the specific use of language and rhetoric in Wollstonecraft's work within a historical context of politicized literary discourse. Barbara Taylor, Vivien Jones, Harriet Guest, Mary Waters, and Caroline Franklin are among many modern scholars who are advancing this perspective.

Modern scholarship has been slow to grant women of the eighteenth century a self-conscious vision of their own roles in a complex and evolving public sphere, as well as their potential to shape the public sphere. Elizabeth Eger points out that 'while the emergence of a literary and public sphere has been seen as definitive of eighteenth-century culture, there has been [...] scant acknowledgment of women's contributions to its character' (2). As we will see in Chapter 1, women authors of the eighteenth century demonstrated not only a capability but a relish for speaking about their own authoritative public agency in contrast and often in conflict with the agency of male authors. Women also voiced opinions about the cultural formation of identity and proposed reforms for the public sphere and its subdivisions, besides displaying highly developed knowledge of literary history, genre, and reader reception.

Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Woman* participates fully in these debates. By example and through exhortation to her fellow writers, Wollstonecraft validates the public role of the woman critic. She also encourages the general female reader to develop a critical sense in more private interactions with written texts. In contrast to many of her contemporaries, however, Wollstonecraft's critiques in *Rights of Woman* do not remain focused on the responsibilities of female writers and the potentially

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<sup>1</sup> A number of studies have been devoted to the issue of the organization of *Rights of Woman*. Syndy Conger, for instance, sees a 'sentimental logic', one in which bursts of emotion are part of a rhetorical strategy. Elissa Guralnick contextualizes the work in the general political discourse of the 1790s rather than within the specifically *feminist* question of women's social roles, thus accounting for tangential discussions of 'a standing army' or the 'pestiferous purple' of monarchy (155-56). Gary Kelly sees *Rights of Woman*, whose Dedication is essentially a letter to Talleyrand, following the 'desultory progression' of epistolary forms (114).

destabilizing reading habits of young women. Wollstonecraft explicitly makes men's writing the central target of her criticism, because it is a 'male' tradition of writing, extending over centuries, which has created the obstacles to women's full development. Wollstonecraft views literature as instrumental in the inculcation of 'a female character', that is, a gendered subjectivity which embodies prevailing norms of femininity. Wollstonecraft challenges optimistic accounts of a canon of literary value with a darker image, a 'medium of books' (*VRW* 5.216). This phrase refers to the cumulative effect of being exposed to literary representations of a weak and diminished femaleness. Despite any aesthetic attractions, the ideology of this 'medium' can dominate the thinking of an age, and of women. Thus, Wollstonecraft's writing is feminist in at least two senses: First, in that it argues for a specific political platform, and, second, in that it analyzes the cultural construction of gender as it is promulgated in written texts over time.

### **Feminist argument**

The act of defining feminism is in itself a declaration of a particular political and critical perspective. The term 'feminism' first appears in the late nineteenth century, and by the early twentieth century comes to stand for a number of distinct and often conflicting critical and political stances. Karen Offen documents the genesis of the term. It is first used widely in France in the 1890s 'as a synonym for women's emancipation', and was subsequently appropriated by movements and writers in Britain, Europe, and the United States (126). The common thread, states Offen, was 'the impetus to critique and improve the disadvantaged status of women relative to men within a particular cultural situation' (132). Wollstonecraft scholars are confronted with the question of whether these broad criteria should be applied to her writing, as well as the historiographical issue of whether the definition of the term ought to be broadened for the very purpose of including a wider range of historical (and international) women thinkers.

Virginia Sapiro makes the necessary distinction between the term as a means of understanding historical continuities and, on the other hand, as a politically functional concept which relies upon that continuity in order to foster a sense of

movement and collectivity. Accordingly, she cites J.G.A. Pocock's comment on the uses of political traditions, even those whose historical continuity is not established.

A tradition ... may stress either the continuity of the process of transmission, or the creative and charismatic origin of what is transmitted. The two are conceptually distinct and entail different images of action and of time but they are dialectically related, and often – perhaps normally – found together within the same tradition. (qtd. in Sapiro 264; Pocock 244)

This statement is particularly relevant to a study of Wollstonecraft's political associates, who constantly reiterated a political tradition of republican writing in order to exploit its rhetorical potential, as we will see in the speech of Richard Price and his allies (cf. 98-100). Pocock's crucial insight into the imaginative component of political histories is applicable to Wollstonecraft in another sense. Her hypothesis of a 'male' tradition of repressive writing 'creates' a tradition which subverts the triumphalist histories of her political associates. Sapiro quotes Pocock, however, in order to justify the study of Wollstonecraft's work as political theory even if no direct line of influence can be drawn from 1792 to the present. Upon this basis, one could go about the study of Wollstonecraft's particular agenda in its relation to contemporary political and intellectual discourses, and expect a degree of relevance to current concerns to emerge, which is precisely Sapiro's aim.

Sapiro gives her basic definition with the clear understanding she is speaking from the point of view of the twentieth century, but asserts her definition is 'not transhistorical' (259). Sapiro defines feminism as having four basic elements: opposition to social hierarchies based on gender, identification of certain social structures *as* hierarchies, the supposition that women's current social status is socially determined and not sanctioned by God or nature, and recognition of women as a social group which must act collectively in order to enact concrete change (258-59). Sapiro recognizes that Wollstonecraft's basic argument in *Rights of Woman* contains the first three elements. The last parameter, the conception and promotion of collective action, is not found in Wollstonecraft's writing, according to Sapiro. Sapiro's account reveals a tension between the usefulness of the concept for political action, and as a conceptual category that assists in the study of the history *of* political action, or, as Sapiro asserts, 'for the working purpose of speaking across times and societies' (258).

To retroactively apply the features of a later political movement to those of the past may lead us to undervalue important dimensions of historical thought that do not correspond to later configurations. For Barbara Taylor, the danger of seeing Wollstonecraft as a proto-feminist, anticipating twentieth-century feminism, is that the extent of her religious thought is underplayed while her program for women's rights is reductively described as 'liberal bourgeois'.<sup>2</sup> Ultimately, Taylor employs the term 'only after much consideration', braving the possible 'anachronism' in order to analyze aspects of Wollstonecraft's thought that have not received sufficient attention (*Imagination* 12).

Sapiro points out that the use of 'feminism' as a descriptive term for activities prior to the early twentieth century must be undertaken with 'the greatest caution and consciousness' (258). She nevertheless declares that it is acceptable to judge past feminisms in terms of a modern understanding of the concept.

It is appropriate to take a term grounded in one historical circumstance as a tool to compare, contrast, and track phenomena from different circumstances, as long as that grounding and the consequent limitations are understood. (259)

Sapiro's own judgment of Wollstonecraft is that the lack of commitment to collective action is a less evolved form of feminism, a 'germinal feminism' (272). Sapiro maintains a historicist perspective in her claim that collectivity was not an available concept in the eighteenth and for most of the nineteenth century (258). Although the recognition of conceptual difference is an indispensable part of a historicist approach, it is important to analyze what conceptions of sexual and political identity actually were available.

When the sophistication and extent of the literary criticism in *Rights of Woman* is sufficiently valued, as well as Wollstonecraft's self-consciousness of the role of a

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<sup>2</sup> For Taylor, Wollstonecraft's idealization of individual effort has formal similarities to what may be termed bourgeois discourse, but her own group was socially distinct: 'these radicals were not, as is sometimes argued, the temporarily revolutionary face of a rising bourgeois elite, but a very specific cultural grouping living on the margins of – and often in direct collision with – mainstream middle-class Britain' (166-67). Gal Gerson's study of liberalism in Wollstonecraft and Mill offers the valuable insight that individualism in Wollstonecraft is conditioned by her feminism rather than the other way around (795). In other words, more attention needs to be paid to the manner in which Wollstonecraft may have been able to appropriate contemporary discourses to her program.

woman critic in a public forum, greater connections may be seen between Wollstonecraft and modern feminism. For this reason I offer two qualifications to Sapiro's definition. First, feminism seeks to *extend* both its analytical and political activities beyond what is currently available at a given time. In this sense, it is progressive and critical. Second, feminism involves a constant reassessment of feminist activity itself, both current and historical, and thus contains a reflexive component, that is, a metacritical perspective on the activities of feminist cultural criticism itself.

Thus, the most convincing motivation for the use of 'feminism' is to mark the many areas of continuity in women's writing, thinking, and political activities over time. The terms 'feminists' and 'feminism' give historical shape to a set of critiques and political positions that have too much in common to be fragmented into separate historical phenomena, especially considering the attempts in the eighteenth century to think *in terms* of intellectual and political traditions. Recent studies have contributed important re-evaluations of women's writing in Wollstonecraft's time, including forms of literary and more general cultural criticism, but there is less recognition that a metacritical perspective is something that is found in historical women's writing as well. In short, the title of feminist theorist is bestowed reluctantly upon women writers of the past.

Wollstonecraft's criticism of contemporaries is a key component of her feminist argument, and she situates her own literary critical activities in contrast to the interpretive strategies of her peers. This is evidenced in her objection to some of the writing of Anna Laetitia Barbauld, whose prominent role as a learned woman is inconsistent with the publication of light, derivative verse. What is important about this critique, which I analyze in Chapter 4, is that Barbauld is taken as representative of a type of literary response on the part of women writers, and not as an isolated case. Accordingly, *Rights of Woman* offers a survey of a number of other women writers. What appears as an exhortation to other women to write and read differently is in essence an agenda of raising public consciousness that literature is fundamentally political. Wollstonecraft does not restrict the discussion to women's writing, but assesses a number of writers in terms of a broad literary context, discussing the current state of literary culture as well as (hypothesizing the existence of) literary traditions. This is not, indeed, a unique feature of *Rights of Woman*, but



constitutes a self-conscious attention to 'methodology' that is typical of the intellectual culture of the eighteenth century, as Elizabeth Eger puts it.

A certain methodological self-consciousness, a trait which Stephen Greenblatt has described as one of the distinctive marks of New Historicism, is present in Cooper's text, reminding us that such consciousness is not as New as we would like to think when we write about previous literary cultures. ('Canon' 204)

In her study of women and their strategic self-situation in the eighteenth-century public sphere, Eger discusses Elizabeth Cooper's introduction to her 1737 anthology of poetry, *The Muses Library*. Considering that Cooper argued that poets of the past must be reprinted or they will be lost, Eger argues that Cooper demonstrates a literary self-consciousness.<sup>3</sup> If the impulse of literary retrospection, one that becomes increasingly common in the eighteenth century, is seen on its face as a proto-historicism, then it is only reasonable to interpret Wollstonecraft's construction of a 'tradition' of male writing as a form of 'self-conscious' literary theorizing.

Ultimately, we should not be restricted to the study of political assertions in *Rights of Woman*, but ought to consider Wollstonecraft's self-contextualization in a political field. The metacritical stance taken by Sapiro here in regard to the theory of traditions is also a feature of Wollstonecraft's feminism. Wollstonecraft draws from her contemporaries' concern with the reality of such things as a 'commonwealthman' tradition, an issue I discuss in chapter 2. The presence of contemporary debates over literary and political traditions allows Wollstonecraft to form an image of other historical phenomena. Wollstonecraft theorizes the concept of a 'male' tradition of writing, which she claims can be traced *at least* as far back as Moses's writings, another aspect of my discussion in chapter 2 (*VRW* 2.95). Wollstonecraft offers a historiography of gender discourse which prefigures modern feminist arguments, and must be considered feminist in the same sense that we can refer to Sapiro's work as feminism. Finally, Wollstonecraft embodies the 'dialectic' which Pocock mentions, but whereas Pocock is discussing the positive construction of political histories for the sake of encouraging collective action, Wollstonecraft gives a negative image of

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<sup>3</sup> In Cooper's words, 'to memorialize some worthy but neglected authors, to provide the public with some generally unknown and unavailable works, to trace the progress of English literature' (qtd. in Eger 204).

'male' literary traditions. It is a primary aim of this thesis to prove that in *Rights of Woman* Wollstonecraft not only employs literary criticism in order to reveal the inevitable and unfortunate politics implicit in the writing of her contemporaries, but also asks that her contemporaries themselves rise to a level of political self-consciousness in their reading and writing.

## **Literary criticism**

What forms did literary criticism take in the eighteenth century and how did women participate in it? In order to understand literary criticism at this time, it is useful to begin with eighteenth-century conceptions of 'literature' itself. As scholars have by now established, the category of 'literature' was much broader in this period than subsequently. This term gradually evolves from a description of written texts of practically any genre, to one which refers to written works of invention, primarily fiction. As Douglas Patey points out,

The term 'literature' still meant, primarily, as Johnson defines it in the *Dictionary* (1755), 'learning; skill in letters' – erudition in whatever field; the concept was only gradually being reformulated (and contracted) to its modern sense of literary 'art' or 'imaginative' literature (literature as fundamentally aesthetic in purpose and effect: poems, novels, and plays), a process of redefinition occurring in the context of much larger reconceptualizations of such categories and terms as 'art', 'science', and 'humanities', and one not complete until the nineteenth century. (7)

There is little dispute that 'literature' as a category of writing was becoming more clearly defined and delimited by the end of the eighteenth century. It is also important to understand that the writers of the time debated and therefore influenced the process, and did so because the act of defining literature was itself understood to be a political one. Wollstonecraft's first mention of the term in *Rights of Woman* makes this clear:

Thus, as wars, agriculture, commerce, and literature, expand the mind, despots are compelled to make covert corruption hold fast the power which was formerly snatched by open force. (*VRW* 1.87)

The appearance of the term 'literature' throughout *Rights of Woman* indicates that in the 1790s, its more restrictive and belletristic sense was by no means fully established, and in fact, Wollstonecraft's very insistence upon the broader definition of literature marks her work as politically progressive in the eyes of her contemporaries. In the passage above, Wollstonecraft invokes Enlightenment historiography, which imagines an increase in all kinds of literate activity in the late Middle Ages inexorably leading to political reforms later on. Another passage, in the midst of the argument that most women are sequestered both physically and intellectually from the public, confirms that the term 'literature' for Wollstonecraft is politically charged:

The intellectual world is shut against them; take them out of their family or neighbourhood, and they stand still; the mind finding no employment, for literature affords a fund of amusement, which they have never sought to relish, but frequently to despise. The sentiments and taste of more cultivated minds appear ridiculous, even in those whom chance and family connexions have led them to love; but in mere acquaintance they think it all affectation. (VRW 4.135)

For Wollstonecraft, literature includes the written products of intellectuals, but to the consciousness of young women, as she implies here, this branch of writing appears only in its most superficial aspect. These readers do not attend to the content, but only the outward form of intellectual writing – the 'sentiments' and 'taste' of it. Thus, these texts are 'despised' by young women presumably because their exposure to all sorts of literature has been limited to 'mere acquaintance'. The pressure of social norms of dress and domestic duties tends to displace critical thinking. A routine which includes 'literature' could reverse this problem:

And did they pursue a plan of conduct, and not waste their time in following the fashionable vagaries of dress, the management of their household and children need not shut them out from literature, or prevent their attaching themselves to a science with that steady eye which strengthens the mind, or practising one of the fine arts that cultivate the taste. (VRW 13.263)

Coming at the end of *Rights of Woman*, this is part of Wollstonecraft's argument that any reading is better than no reading at all. 'Literature' here is posed as a form of resistance to public pressure to conform to norms of appearance, and opposes the



notion that women's entire social subjectivity can be expressed through their domestic roles. As we will see below, Wollstonecraft's stance on this issue stands in contrast to many contemporary women writers.

Although the term 'literary criticism' was not frequently used before the nineteenth century, commentaries on texts already had many of the features that would today readily qualify. The absence of the term is more due to open nature of all written genres than to a lack of a full analytical apparatus for examining texts. As Douglas Patey explains,

The phrase 'literary criticism' is itself to be found scarcely anywhere in the eighteenth century: in a variety of ways, the phrase suggests a realignment of disciplines and institutions only just occurring. (7)

For this reason, any study of literary criticism of the eighteenth century ought to begin with the premise that this activity can be found in a wide range of genres and communicative settings.

Criticism, then, is not a genre, nor even a name for a group of genres. It happens not only in essays, reviews, philosophical dialogues, lecture courses, treatises; but also in novels, epigrams, plays and theatrical prologues and epilogues, long poems, editions of texts, conversations, duels, gardens. (25)

Categories of literary genre which are formed after this period continue to present obstacles to the study of eighteenth-century texts. Patey comments on this phenomenon as well.

[W]hen twentieth-century scholars look back to the eighteenth for its own histories of criticism, such self-identifications [Pope's and Coleridge's] are often overlooked; the scholar does not recognize histories of criticism which are embedded in other genres, or which present themselves in other than a scholarly guise. (22)

Here, Patey refers to the 'self-identifications' in Pope's *Essay on Criticism* (1711) and Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* (1817). If, as Patey argues, the recognition of eighteenth-century literary criticism is made more difficult by expectations of which genres may house it, then studies of women's literary criticism of the eighteenth century face similar challenges. Likewise, these studies ought to begin with the

premise that women's literary criticism must be sought in any number of communicative sites. Terry Castle's recent essay, 'Women and literary criticism', is a step in this direction:

Women critics employed a variety of rhetorical formats, reflecting the assortment of contexts in which the practice of criticism itself – which had yet to be defined in strictly professional or academic terms – was pursued in the period. [...] Prefaces, dedications, epilogues, linguistic treatises, translations, reviews, anthologies, biographical memoirs, private correspondence, and literary works themselves [...] all provided contexts in which a distinctly 'critical' discourse might flourish. (438)

Castle poses these various modes and sites of criticism as necessary expedients in light of various 'inhibitions' against public literary women. The number of studies which consider the possibility that literary criticism plays an important role in *Rights of Woman* is still limited, I argue, because this text has most often been seen as a political treatise, or a relatively unadventurous educational treatise, as an influential article by Regina Janes has claimed.

### **Eighteenth-century feminism and the public sphere**

In 'On the Reception of Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*', Regina Janes maintains that *Rights of Woman* was politically unremarkable in 1792 because it was received as a treatise on education rather than a particularly radical demand for women's political standing. For Janes, it was only after the publication of William Godwin's *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1798) immediately following Wollstonecraft's death, together with the developments in France, that Wollstonecraft was 'vilified by the press', and became for more than a century a name to be 'brandished against advocates for women's rights' (293). Apparently Godwin's recounting of Wollstonecraft's sexual transgressions caused much more alarm than any radical demands in *Rights of Woman*.

In order to make this case, Janes examines several periodical reviews of *Rights of Woman*, all of which, with one exception, appear to be favourable except.<sup>4</sup> Janes relies on statements from the periodicals themselves to establish its genre. The *Analytical Review* of 1792 states that, 'in reality the present work is an elaborate treatise of female education [...]' (13:530). It is certainly appropriate to look to periodical reviews in a discussion of the 'reception' of a work in the eighteenth century. The periodical stands at the centre of literary culture of the time, and Jon Klancher describes it as 'the chief mediator of the world of letters' ('Genre' 148). However, to rely almost exclusively on these same texts as authoritative accounts of the genre of the work is less convincing, especially when the sample of responses is itself limited generically, in this case coming primarily from a small number periodical reviewers. Even in the wording above, the reviewer seems to be arguing against a perception that the work is something more than a 'treatise of female education'.

In contrast to Janes, Harriet Guest considers a wider sample of contemporary reactions in print. She notes that the educationalist and critic Anna Seward approved of much of the text despite her generally conservative politics. On the other hand, the poet Sarah Trimmer read the text and was uncomfortable with the idea of independent women. Guest also considers Hannah More, who famously claimed that the very title was enough to keep her from reading *Rights of Woman*.<sup>5</sup>

Whether or not they had actually read the second *Vindication*, these writers clearly perceived it in the context of a polemical genre associated primarily with the discourse of rights – they perceived it as a political text. (*Small Change* 274)

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<sup>4</sup> The primary responses are from the following: *Analytical Review* 12 (1792): 241-49; 13 (1792): 481-89. *Critical Review* n.s. 4 (1792): 389-98; 5 (1792): 132-41. *Literary Magazine and British Review* 8 (1792): 133-39. *Monthly Review* n.s. 8 (1792): 198-209. *Scots Magazine* 54 (1792): 284-90. For a more complete list, see Macdonald and Scherf, p. 453.

<sup>5</sup> Sarah Trimmer (1741-1810) was a writer of children's literature and founder of several children's schools. Her most well-known children's text is *Fabulous Histories* (1786). Trimmer also published the periodical *The Guardian of Education* (1802-06), and wrote over 400 literary reviews (Grenby xvi). Anna Seward (1747-1809) wrote patriotic war poetry, much of it published in the *Gentleman's Magazine*. She was a severe critic of Clara Reeve (Folger's Collective 165-73), whose genre-study, *The Progress of Romance* (1785), I examine in detail below. Hannah More (1745-1833) was a highly influential educational writer, evangelist, educational activist, and critic. Her most important conduct book is *Strictures on Female Education* (1799). She wrote a series of reactionary tracts during the 1790s' 'Revolution debate', most notably *Village Politics* (1792).

Guest's work is part of increasing scholarly investigations into the breadth and specificity of women's writing as it related to contemporary politics. The point is that Wollstonecraft's work was considered implicitly political despite efforts to place it in a category set apart from politics. In fact, the struggle between politically progressive writers and others was precisely over the politicization of educational genres. 'Women's' genres such as educational writing were fully enmeshed in the political and social debate, and most readers and writers of the time were already aware of these interrelationships.

In the context of the eighteenth century, one manifestation of feminism is advocacy for women's education, but this agenda could be quite distinct from a more troublesome demand for greater public roles for women, which could include authorship, financial autonomy, sole stewardship of a family, and ultimately an independent civic identity. Regina Janes's article has been profoundly influential, and unfortunately so, not least because she establishes a mutually exclusive binary between education and domestic status on the one hand, and political status on the other:

[T]he reception of Wollstonecraft's work, and that of her followers, Mary Robinson and Mary Hays, illuminates an interesting moment in the historical transformation of women's status. Those works, part educational, part psychological, part political, appeared when the contest for the improvement of women's education and their status in the family had been largely won, and the contest for enlarged political, civil, social liberties was about to be joined. (293)<sup>6</sup>

At least from one point of view, Janes's argument is plausible, because this binary was present in the writings of many women writers, but I question whether these same writers were responding to a social phenomenon or were actively intervening in its construction.

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<sup>6</sup> Mary Robinson (1757-1800) was a famous actress, mistress of George IV when he was Prince of Wales, and a feminist writer. Along with poetry and drama, she wrote *Letter to the Women of England on the Injustice of Mental Subordination* (1799). Mary Hays (1760-1843) was a self-taught intellectual, involved in the social circles of radical Dissent. She wrote the highly controversial *Emma Courtney* (1796), a key 'Jacobin' text. Wollstonecraft was a strong influence upon Robinson, and upon Hays's literary reviews, and most likely upon Hays's treatise on women's rights, *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women* (1798).

The following brief summary of contemporary writings by women reveals very different notions of how education and social roles interact. Hester Chapone's *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* (1783), one of the more influential conduct books of the time, remained in print for eighty years, and is mentioned in *Rights of Woman* in a short list of important educational texts (5.209). Chapone recommends extensive reading in most fields of study; two chapters on the interpretation of history conclude the text. However, her views on women's proper social sphere were more restrictive: 'Within the circle of her [woman's] own family and dependents lies her sphere of action' (*Improvement* 5). Catharine Macaulay's *Letters on Education* (1790) contains less tension between the empowering potential of education and the insistence on domestic roles that in practical terms could foreclose the self-development of women. In *Letters on Education* there is little talk of the domestic roles of women, while the issue of education is imbued with a social critique. Macaulay is explicit in presenting education as one of the factors in gender formation:

The situation and education of women, Hortensia, is precisely that which must necessarily tend to corrupt and debilitate both the powers of mind and body. From a false notion of beauty and delicacy, their system of nerves is depraved before they come out of their nursery; and this kind of depravity has more influence over the mind, and consequently over morals, than is commonly apprehended. (207)

This perspective has rightly been seen as an influence upon Wollstonecraft.

In *Strictures on Female Education* (1799), the relatively more conservative Hannah More is adamant in her argument to keep women at home, and to inculcate a sense of propriety, that is, a repressive code of sexual behaviour. Although she recommends a higher degree of education for women, the primary function of education is to safeguard women's sexual 'purity':

It is a singular injustice which is often exercised towards women, first to give them a most defective Education, and then to expect from them the most undeviating purity of conduct; - to train them in such a manner as shall lay them open to the most dangerous faults, and then to censure them for not proving faultless. (1: ix)



As Mary Poovey has rightly pointed out, the inculcation of a sexual code of behaviour, usually embodied in the ideal term 'modesty', worked to limit women's public behaviours (23). This included the control of those writers who advocated a broader set of social roles for women. For More, education is posed expressly against public roles, whether intellectual or otherwise. In reaction to Wollstonecraft and perhaps her allies, More makes this quite clear:

[T]he imposing term of *rights* has been produced to sanctify the claim of our female pretenders, with a view not only to rekindle in the minds of women a presumptuous vanity dishonourable to their sex, but produced with a view to excite in their hearts an impious discontent with the post which God has assigned them in this world. (*Strictures* 2:20)

If the reaction to Wollstonecraft was due primarily to the revelations in Godwin's biographical *Memoirs*, it is not borne out by this particular passage. Although More's *Strictures* is published in 1799, it is not Wollstonecraft's particular indelicacies but her insistence on 'rights' which most perturbs More. The *ad feminams* do come, but only after More's political point is made.

In terms of the contrast of Wollstonecraft's social agenda with the writers above, her conception of women's private and public roles broaches the binary division which was still being consolidated at the time. For Wollstonecraft, women's domestic functions should not determine subjectivity as a whole.

Connected with men as daughters, wives, and mothers, their moral character may be estimated by their manner of fulfilling those simple duties; but the end, the grand end of their exertions should be to unfold their own faculties [...]. (*VRW* 2.95).

Wollstonecraft's ideal of self-development stands in contrast to the religious rhetoric of Hannah More, who declares that women's social roles are 'assigned' by 'God', as the previous passage shows. As Taylor has pointed out, Wollstonecraft also draws upon religion to form her progressive argument, something that I examine at length in Chapter 1 of this thesis. To make her explicit proposal using a more secular political language, women 'must have a civil existence in the State, married or single' (*VRW* 9.219).<sup>7</sup> Although Wollstonecraft values the heterosexual

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<sup>7</sup> As I have indicated in the Textual Note, quotations from *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft* (1989) have been collated with the second edition of *Rights of Woman* (1792), which was corrected by

'companionate' family, to borrow a term from social historian Lawrence Stone, she sees legal and political standing as part of identity, that is, 'existence'. Thus, for Wollstonecraft, the battle for women's education and greater domestic standing had not been 'won', to return to Janes, leaving a separate legal struggle ahead. Wollstonecraft, and her opponents, understood that domestic and civic roles were already mutually dependent. The question was not whether the division of a unitary female subjectivity was constructed, but the extent to which it should be.

Carol Pateman has declared that to interrogate the dichotomy of the public and private is 'ultimately what the feminist movement is about' (118). Wollstonecraft's work must be seen as 'feminist' on this basis as well; she questions this dichotomy in a historical context in which it is at the forefront of nearly any discussion of the socialization of women; debates about women's education, for instance, were essentially debates about their proper sphere of action. Like other texts introduced here, *Rights of Woman* makes an extended argument for women's education, in which reading takes a prominent role. Unlike some of her contemporaries, however, Wollstonecraft presents reading both as a didactic activity which helps socialize women, and as a critical one. The purpose of reading for Wollstonecraft is not merely to make women better companions to men, and modest in public settings, but to understand how women's domestic duties and public roles are constructed by texts, including the educational texts of her contemporaries.

Wollstonecraft's use of the term 'criticism' demonstrates a self-conscious assumption of a public role. At the opening of her critique of John Gregory, she emphasizes that in order to take on the 'task', she must shift from the role of private reader to public commentator:

Such paternal solicitude pervades Dr Gregory's *Legacy to his Daughters*, that I enter on the task of *criticism* with affectionate respect; but as this little volume has many attractions to recommend it to the notice of the most respectable part of my sex, I cannot silently pass over arguments that so speciously support opinions which, I think, have had the most baneful effect on the morals and manners of the female world. (*VRW* 5.166; my emphasis; cf. 213)

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Wollstonecraft, returning to the punctuation and capitalization of the earlier edition. The capitalization of the word 'state' here helps to emphasize Wollstonecraft's conception of the political entity as apart from other social spheres.

Regardless of her admitted personal regard for Dr Gregory, Wollstonecraft declares that it is her duty to speak critically because his writing is having an influence upon women, including fellow female critics, as well as those women who read *Legacy* simply as a conduct manual. As Simon Jarvis points out,

Because criticism is an activity that can take place in almost any genre, written criticism is always giving out, alongside its judgments, a series of messages about the kind of writing to which it belongs, and the kind of authorial persona which goes along with this. (25)

Jarvis's insight is important because Wollstonecraft's self-conscious intervention into the 'effect' of Gregory's text is both descriptive and performative. In other words, in *Rights of Woman* Wollstonecraft both comments on the untoward moral influence of particular texts upon women – a typical concern of women commentators at this time – and enacts the authoritative role of the public female critic.

In order to better understand Wollstonecraft's conceptualization of the literary public, it is helpful to examine Jürgen Habermas's theory of the literary public sphere and the important revisions of this theory offered by feminist critics. This is necessary primarily because Habermas offers a historical perspective into how critical activity helped to first conceive and then constitute a sphere of social existence known as the 'public'. The complement to this 'public' is the 'intimate' sphere. These conceptualizations acted to normatize women's roles in these social spaces. Wollstonecraft, like other women writers, was active in resisting the dominant conceptions of private and public. As I have mentioned above, Wollstonecraft must be seen as attempting to influence the formation of social spheres and not merely a subject to an inexorable configuration.

Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* posits the formation of a public sphere that arose in opposition to the absolutist state in France, Germany, and England from the seventeenth through eighteenth centuries. This public sphere took the form of either physical meeting places, such as the coffeehouses where men met to have discussions, the salons of bluestockings and other women's groups, or the virtual forum of literary activity in periodicals and



other written texts. Habermas's 'literary public sphere' was composed of private people who, through printed texts, 'came to know themselves' as individuals.

[B]efore the public sphere explicitly assumed political functions in the tension-charged field of state-society relations, the subjectivity originating in the intimate sphere of the conjugal family created, so to speak, its own public. (29)

Thus, in Habermas's account, a bourgeois 'public sphere' was a subset of the private sphere. This public sphere included intimate and domestic interactions; Habermas considers these distinct from the courtly public sphere of the state and its executive functions.

As Clifford Siskin has pointed out, the grouping of public and private within one 'realm' is the most important aspect of Habermas's model for understanding the way in which communication was thought to occur between these spheres:

What is crucial to his argument, but often overlooked, is that he describes not a single public/private binary, but a double one – a doubleness that he presents as historically constituted. The eighteenth century, he argues, inherited a "fundamental" distinction between the state, as the sphere of public authority, and society, as the private realm, and then differentiated the latter into a political and cultural public sphere versus the privacy of the family and civil society. (163)

Siskin's formulation helps to make clear the manner in which Habermas hypothesises social categories. It is important to clarify Habermas's terminology: he considers all expressions that are not emanations of the state to be 'private'. Within this 'private' sphere he finds two subsections. One he terms the 'intimate', or the area of domestic and familial interactions. The other he terms the 'public', which includes both physical meeting places, such as coffeehouses, as well as literary activity, such as the interactive environment of periodicals like the *Spectator* and the *Gentleman's Magazine*. This is distinct from the 'public' of the state, and, in fact, the literary public is a site from which the state can be critiqued.

The literary public sphere was theoretically open to all because its central criterion for participation was rationality, posed as a disinterested modality. This rationality, supposedly within the reach of all, was a more inclusive criterion for

membership in the literary public sphere than the forms of membership which characterized the public sphere of the absolutist state, which were contingent upon rank and birth. The literary public sphere, at least in theory, allowed anyone who conformed to the criteria of literacy and rationality to participate. However, it is precisely the assumption of inclusivity, and the assumed universality of a discourse of reason, without a full appreciation of how these discourses could work to marginalize women, that has given rise to feminist revisions of Habermas. In *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*, Joan Landes argues that women were in fact pressured to retreat from the literary public sphere, which was constructed precisely for that exclusion.

I claim that the bourgeois public is essentially, not just contingently, masculinist, and that this characteristic serves to determine both its self-representation and its subsequent “structural transformation”. (*Sphere* 7)

Landes argues that the central discursive feature of the literary public sphere of the eighteenth century is not an inclusive rationality, but a gendered divide between public and private, in which the effeminacy attributed to courtly culture is banished to the private, while the ascendant masculinity of the ‘bourgeois’ comes to dominate the public sphere.<sup>8</sup>

Landes agrees with Habermas that the literary public sphere arose as a means of resistance to the absolutist state, but she argues that the primary constitutive element of the literary public sphere is gender. In particular, bourgeois males defined their gender in contrast to ‘corrupt’ and ‘effeminate’ members of the absolutist state:

In a society in which one man was so far elevated above all the rest, it would seem that all subjects, male and female, shared a subordinate posture. The effect of the king’s supremacy in the grand household of the kingdom, therefore, was to “domesticate,” even un-man, those who ought to have been his peers. This, as we shall see, was the angry protest of those who celebrated the virile constitutions of republics and despised the “effeminized” status of men under absolutism. (*Sphere* 21)

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<sup>8</sup> As we will see in the next chapter, Clifford Siskin offers a similar model, but aimed more specifically at categories of knowledge and their subsequent manifestation in literary genre (55).

Landes sees this state of affairs as the background for republican discourse of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Men under absolutism were put on a par with women, or were forced to seek patronage from certain powerful women in the political sphere. In this way, the impetus for a separate sphere of activity came from the desire to exclude not just effeminate mores from the public, but women themselves. As an example of this, Landes discusses Protestant diatribes against salonnières (30-31).<sup>9</sup> We can find further evidence of anti-woman theories of public in Rousseau, who saw a danger in the literary critical activity of salon women, an issue I address in Chapter 3.<sup>10</sup>

The exclusion of women from public critical activity, writes Landes, leads to the creation of separate spheres of activity for men and women, a political public and a 'depoliticised' domestic sphere. She cites Montesquieu's comments on domesticity, from *The Spirit of the Laws*, as symptomatic of this ideology.

The forward march of civilization, he cautions, requires the domestication of women; in a more advanced society, women will be sure to occupy their proper place. The domestic woman is accommodated to her new surroundings, her narcissistic vanity and licentious use of freedom are curbed, and her nature, like that of a domesticated animal, is made to fit a depoliticised domestic environment. (38)

An important component of republican discourse was the attack on the unchaste behaviour of public women; this was one of the ways that the critique of courtly culture became a staple of the ideology of separate spheres. Women are described as 'vain' and 'licentious', a description that is used as a justification for placing them outside of the political public. Landes concludes that a discourse which begins by rejecting the supposedly effeminate public representations of absolutism eventually excludes women themselves.

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<sup>9</sup> In his history of the French Revolution, Simon Schama argues that misogynistic images of Marie Antoinette in the press were used to further an anti-monarchic agenda: 'All of these sexual demonologies – of the spy-whore, the King's dominatrix, the infector of the constitution – were stirred up into a richly poisonous polemic [...]' (*Citizens* 225). This view of republican rhetoric exemplifies Schama's hypothesis that the French Revolution was not as 'radical' as the enlightened aristocracy it replaced.

<sup>10</sup> The two crucial texts in this regard are Book Five of *Emile*, and the explicit discussion of the influence of literary women upon the public in *Letter to D'Alembert*.

## Genres and Politics

Landes, with other critics, considers women writers of Wollstonecraft's time unequal to the task of subverting the ideology of gendered and separate spheres because their own writings were constructed by the same discourses which sustained this ideology. A version of this hypothesis is presented below, in Susan Gubar's argument that Wollstonecraft's feminism, with its exhortations to women, could not free itself from misogynist themes. Landes recognises that Wollstonecraft offers 'resistance' to the republican doctrine that demanded the exclusion of women from critical, and therefore political, functions in the public. However, she finds Wollstonecraft complicit with this state of affairs precisely because Wollstonecraft valorises the domestic roles of women. More recent commentary argues that women writers resisted and revised the dominant image of the privatised woman. Eve Tavor Bannet cites the work of recent feminist commentators in order to describe this shift in modern scholarship, arguing that 'Enlightenment feminist writers were "not passively mirroring cultural ascriptions, but ... ["]purposely appropriating them to serve women-defined ends" and "reshaping ideology closer to their hearts' desire"' (5).<sup>11</sup>

The trend in recent commentary, this thesis included, has been to recognise a greater ability amongst women writers in this period to employ extant discourses for 'their own ends', and a number of recent studies have been animated by this assumption. Nevertheless, studies by Landes and Poovey are indispensable not only because they focus upon oppressive discourses and their manifestations in the writing of women, but also because they maintain the perspective that the public and private are themselves formed by exclusionary conceptions of gender roles. I disagree with these theorists because they see the categories of public and private as immune to the interventions of women thinkers. In the particular case of Wollstonecraft, it is important to continue to interrogate the connections between the political and religious arguments in *Rights of Woman* and those of male Dissenters, especially Richard Price, an issue I discuss in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3, likewise, I trace the

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<sup>11</sup> These three phrases are from Mitzi Myers, Patricia Myer Spacks, and Anne K. Mellor, respectively (Bannet n.226).

connection between culturally normative practices in mid-century periodicals, and how these same practices appear in *Rights of Woman*. In Chapter 4 of this thesis, I argue that Wollstonecraft's intervention in the conception of the public sphere is clear both in her self-presentation as public critic rather than private female reader, and in her interrogation of Gregory's own authority as a figure in the literary public.

A fundamental aim of feminist criticism is to analyse how gender roles are made normative, and to critique the 'medium' through which this is accomplished. Susan Gubar agrees that *Rights of Woman* is 'one of the earliest instances' of 'feminist criticism' in its focus on literature as the medium for debilitating notions of femininity because 'we are what we read' ('Misogyny' 455; cf. footnote #17). The question which Gubar then asks is whether Wollstonecraft is able to take some prevalent critiques of women and transform them into a feminist argument. For Gubar, Wollstonecraft remains unsuccessful in this endeavour because she rehearses the misogynist diatribes that can be found, for example, in Swift, Pope, and others.

If we compare Wollstonecraft's portrait of the feminine here with the notoriously severe eighteenth-century satirists of the weaker sex, it becomes clear that she shares with them Hamlet's revulsion. Judge Wollstonecraft's emphasis on libertine notions of beauty, for example, in terms of Pope's famous lines in his 'Epistle to a Lady' – 'ev'ry Woman is at heart a Rake' and 'Most women have no characters at all' – as well as his insistence that the best woman is 'a contradiction' in terms, 'a softer man'. Consider her picture of female animality and dilettantism in relation to Swift's monstrous Goddess of Criticism in *A Tale of a Tub*, a symbol of ignorance portrayed as part cat, part ass. [...] Why does Wollstonecraft's text so eerily echo those composed by masculine satirists? (459)

Rather than examine in detail the differences between Wollstonecraft and these writers, or Wollstonecraft's particular engagement with this tradition in lengthy and explicit critiques, Gubar is satisfied to conclude that, like these writers, Wollstonecraft's satirical attacks on women's behaviours border on 'misogyny', part of the title of Gubar's article. Gubar makes the broad claim that Wollstonecraft's writing, like all 'feminist expository prose', necessarily 'embeds itself in a misogynist tradition it seeks to address and redress' (462).

On the one hand, Gubar's observation on the influence of early eighteenth-century prose upon Wollstonecraft can be substantiated. According to Michael Scrivener,



‘the influence of early eighteenth-century literary models on some of the reformist writers cannot be disputed’ (53). Even conceding this point, it is fully possible that Wollstonecraft was capable of appropriating extant prose traditions for functions quite different from those intended by Pope or Swift. Moreover, the presence of many other stylistic influences indicates more control of the prose than Gubar’s metaphor of a writer passively ‘embedded’ allows. *Rights of Woman* also contains the influence of Rousseau’s moralist rhetoric, periodical reviewing practices, and conduct book literature, to mention just three. Even if it were plausible that the primary influence upon Wollstonecraft’s prose is limited to the Tory satirists, Gubar does not grant Wollstonecraft the capacity to appropriate and reshape this language, or others, to her purposes.

Rita Felski has argued that in the study of feminist texts, it is not enough to analyze their formal features: ‘Radical impulses are not inherent in the formal properties of texts; they can be realized only through interactions between texts and readers [...]’ (162). This does not mean that language is a transparent medium and formal properties are inconsequential. Felski recognizes that women’s writing carries the properties of a patriarchal literary tradition, and in this sense, she advisedly adopts the idea that it is ‘embedded’ in male traditions, to use Gubar’s term. However, Felski also argues against going to the extreme of negating agency altogether.

[I]n attempting to avoid a voluntarism which assumes that language is a transparent instrument free of ideology, it [the ‘formalist’ analysis of feminist writing] falls into the opposite trap of a linguistic determinism, which interprets all discursive language as a reinforcement of patriarchal structures. [...] [S]imply to *equate* language with power (that is, symbolic discourse with patriarchy) is to obliterate fundamental distinctions between the various functions and contexts of language use and to devalue subjective agency and critical intervention in such a way as to negate the very legitimacy of the writer’s own theoretical position. (42)

While ‘voluntarism’ could be seen as a disingenuous assumption of complete autonomy on the part of certain writers, Gubar herself does not surrender authoritative license. When Gubar considers her own relationship to a notable patriarchal figure, she grants herself a greater degree of immunity, and agency, than she allows Wollstonecraft:

When questioned about our reliance on Freud, Sandra [Gilbert] and I tend to respond by emphasizing how we have sought to disentangle the *descriptive* powers of his insights into the sex/gender system from the *prescriptive* overlay contained in the values he assigns to aspects or stages of that system. (464)

I argue, while acknowledging a debt to Felski, that the ability to self-consciously appropriate analytical frameworks as well as rhetorical strategies is something that must be allowed to feminist writers of the past, and not arrogated to modern commentators alone. With regard to Wollstonecraft, there is a growing recognition of her ability to appropriate available discourses and analytical frameworks.<sup>12</sup>

The expression of a feminist agenda in the form of literary criticism is fully part of the practices of this historical period. Wollstonecraft's literary criticism is political both because it is an embodiment of her feminist agenda, and also because even the routine use of methodologies and theories of literary criticism was considered political. I argue that the terms of the title to this thesis, feminist argument and literary criticism, were to a great extent mutually reinforcing, and properly historicize *Rights of Woman*. Jon Klancher describes the explicit politicisation of literature at this time, including the metacritical discussion of literary parameters such as genre. He demonstrates this through an examination of William Godwin's *The Herald of Literature* (1784). In this experimental parody of a literary review, Godwin presents the latest work of some contemporary writers. The extracts, 'quoted' in full, are actually written by Godwin himself. The *Herald* fabricates a chapter from Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, political tracts by Burke and Paine, a

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<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth Yeo notes the established concept of linguistic and conceptual appropriation in radical thought, and in this regard makes the connection between Marxist and feminist criticism:

[E]ven the most seemingly unpromising languages are contestable, in the sense that old meaning of important concepts and representations can be challenged and new meaning created. The Marxist philosopher of language, V.N. Volosinov argued as long ago as 1929 that it is precisely the capacity of any powerful sign to carry different meanings, which makes for its 'vitality and dynamism and the capacity for further development'. (6)

Yeo's source is V.N. Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. L. Matejka and I. Titunik (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard UP, [1929] 1986), p. 23. She also notes this theme in Marx, citing the possibility of using 'borrowed language', from K. Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte', in Marx and Engels, *Selected Works* (Moscow, Foreign Languages Publishing House, [1869] 1962), vol. 1, p. 247.

chapter from an upcoming novel by Fanny Burney, among other material. Klancher argues that by juxtaposing these texts Godwin fictionalises the 'polyphony' of contemporary literary genres and parodies the literary review's role of mediating literature to the public. Godwin 'makes visible' the way in which generic divisions were constructed, in particular the division between history and novel writing, which John Bender has described as the debate over 'fictionality and factuality' (10), a distinction which permeates eighteenth-century literary commentary.

Klancher sees Godwin's experiment as a justification for the deliberate politicisation of the novel, a program which is evident in Godwin's essay, 'On History and Romance' (1797). In it, Godwin makes the claim that the novel writer can provide a more reliable account of the state of society at a given time than the historian. He theorises what is in practice the deployment of *Caleb Williams* (1794) as a piece of political commentary upon 'Things as they are', the subtitle of this novel. This debate, like other literary debates, was undertaken in quite explicit terms, with conservatives reacting not only to transgressions of genre but to theories of how and why generic categories should be transgressed. Although Godwin's 'History and Romance' was not published in this period, the view of literary genres as rhetorical vehicles was a commonplace of contemporary polemics.

An example is the preface to George Walker's novel *The Vagabond* (1799). Walker, citing the threat from radical writers who utilize various genres for their political aims, explains why he has chosen to embody his own politics in the form of a novel:

It [*The Vagabond*] is also an attempt to parry the Enemy with their own weapons; for no channel is deemed improper by them, which can introduce their sentiments. [...] I might observe with the late Lord Orford [Horace Walpole], that Romances are only Histories which we do not believe to be true, and Histories are Romances we do believe to be true. (53)

*The Vagabond* is a crude parody of the radical coterie – 'the Enemy' – associated with William Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft, and other figures such as Thomas Paine. Walker's conservative credentials are signalled by the mention of Horace



Walpole.<sup>13</sup> Walker states that his decision to publish a political novel was forced upon him by the transgressive literary behaviour of the radicals. This assumes that apolitical novelising ought to be the norm, but that the writer is forced to temporarily deviate from this norm in order to do battle with 'the Enemy'. Janet Todd has summarized this reactionary attitude: '[I]f one held radical or liberal views, this was a political stance, but if one expressed proper conservative ones, this was a moral position' (*Angellica* 227). Todd here emphasises the normative element in conservative discourse.

### **The Genre of *Rights of Woman***

Even in modern critical collections that take for granted the wider view of literature and literary commentary, restrictive generic categories continue to hamper a full appreciation of the literary critical dimension of *Rights of Woman*. *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* contains a commonly accepted categorical assessment of *Rights of Woman*. In the introduction of *The Norton Anthology*, literary criticism is defined as an activity which 'presupposes a hidden set of questionable or dangerous premises and values undergirding a complex document'. Literary criticism, in this view, takes an oppositional stance before a text, being 'committed to a set of values different from, or directly opposed to, those expressed in the text' (2). According to the editors, literary criticism is one of three branches of 'literary interpretation', the other two being an exegetical and a personal reading.

These are distinctions which describe the specialized view of the past century, but certainly a close reading of the Bible has been used to make a political argument against opposing interpretations. In the eighteenth century Scriptural exegesis as well as narrativized first person readings were often seen as literary critical activities which could interrogate the 'hidden premises' of texts. Amongst Mary Wollstonecraft's contemporaries, the Dissenter William Geddes, for example, translated and critiqued Scripture to support his anti-lapsarian theology. His was not

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<sup>13</sup> A well-known parody along the same lines is Elizabeth Hamilton's *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800). Here, as was typical, critical commentary, as well as reading itself, was seen as impacting directly upon the political health of the nation.

an arid intellectual argument by any means, if we consider that Dissenters were engaged in a struggle to be accepted to civil posts only open to those who pledged themselves to Anglican articles of faith.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, a 'personal' reading is almost inextricable from technical commentary. Across most written genres of the eighteenth century, including philosophy, 'natural science', and literary criticism, authorial agency is constructed as personal and frequently narrativized. Addressed below (cf. footnote #21), Joseph Priestley employs personal narrative to illustrate a principle in his theory of mind. And we need look no further than Samuel Johnson for literary criticism that is both personal and technical, as we will see in his treatment of Milton in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

Wollstonecraft's treatment of Milton operates along all three of the interpretive lines defined by *The Norton Anthology*. First, Wollstonecraft engages in a close reading of selected quotations from *Paradise Lost*; considering that Milton's rewriting of Genesis was in the process of being, as it were, canonized, I argue that her reading is exegetical. Second, her narrativized personal invective is itself a critical strategy which aims to demystify Milton's status, and to reveal contradictions within the text. Third, Wollstonecraft argues that Milton's 'invention' of woman as sub-rational is posed in a genre that assumes authority, and thus engages in a discussion about literary categories. Despite these elements in Wollstonecraft's analysis of Milton, which satisfy even the limited definition of literary criticism given in the introduction, the particular editor of *The Norton Anthology* who introduces *Rights of Woman* denies Wollstonecraft the title of 'literary critic'. He or she states that Wollstonecraft 'skilfully demystif[ies] all arguments designed to justify inequalities' between men and women. Wollstonecraft is also characterized as 'an acute reader of the contradictions inherent in the literary tradition' and as 'a forerunner of "ideological" reading' (583, 584).

By describing Wollstonecraft's interpretation of literary texts as 'ideological', this editor employs one of the most commonly understood versions of this term: that it is a widely-held set of beliefs which obscures or euphemises existing hierarchies of power. The 'ideological reading' thus coincides with the definition of literary criticism given in the general introduction of *The Norton Anthology* in contrast to the literary critic's commitment to demystifying the hidden assumptions of a 'complex'

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<sup>14</sup> William Geddes, *Critical Remarks on the Hebrew Scriptures* (London, 1800).

target text. Ideology can be considered a set of beliefs understood apart from power relations; a neutral system which can be compared with other systems. Alternatively, ideology can be understood as a pejorative term, that is, as a description of the set of dominant cultural concepts that work to sustain asymmetrical power relations. This usage, as James P. Thompson points out, is a 'critical conception of ideology' and 'preserves the negative connotation which has been conveyed by the term throughout most of its history and it binds the analysis of ideology to the question of critique' (4). This is the sense given to the term by Wollstonecraft's editor in *The Norton Anthology* and, at least in this place, is a fair reading of her position; Wollstonecraft's sees the literary texts of 'male writers' as enabling of men's power over women.<sup>15</sup> Wollstonecraft's analyses of respected works must therefore be called feminist literary criticism; by analysing a wide range of genres, Wollstonecraft retrieves and makes explicit the sexual politics inherent in these works.

Although this editor finds Wollstonecraft's readings to be 'ideological', the claim is that she is 'a cultural and not a literary critic' (584). This is a curious dichotomy in Wollstonecraft's case, and requires some examination. On the one hand, if, as this editor explains, *Rights of Woman* traces problems in a 'literary tradition', and practices an 'ideological reading', then it should merit the label of literary criticism. The commentary on language, agency, and genre that is found in Wollstonecraft's critiques of specific texts and specific passages can only strengthen this judgment. But perhaps other elements of the text disqualify it as literary criticism. The heterogeneity of the narrative language of *Rights of Woman*, and the seeming digressions into disparate topics would understandably lead to a view of the critiques in this text as extra-literary. It is true that Wollstonecraft seems primarily concerned with educational and childrearing practices in Chapters 3, 11, and 12, and female conduct during courtship and marriage in Chapter 9, to give a few examples. But

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<sup>15</sup> Wollstonecraft does not employ the term 'ideology', but the broad definition given by Thompson of a criticism of normative culture is evident in Wollstonecraft's description of 'power':

Power, in fact, is ever true to its vital principle, for in every shape it would reign without control of inquiry. Its throne is built across a dark abyss, which no eye must dare to explore, lest the baseless fabric should totter under investigation. (*VRW* 10.221)

This is essentially the 'negative criticism' Thompson has identified – the criticism of a set of beliefs implicit in cultural products which function to support social hierarchies. Wollstonecraft's metaphor of the 'shape' which is taken by 'power' is equivalent to this version of 'ideology'.

these should not necessarily displace the primarily literary discussions that occur in the first half of Chapter 2, in the central portions of Chapter 3, at the start of Chapter 4, and for the entirety of Chapter 5, which is also the longest in the text. However, even in those places where the discussion veers away from books, new topics are often introduced by allusions to a passage or comment in one of Wollstonecraft's target texts. One example which I examine in detail in Chapter 3 of this thesis is Wollstonecraft's tale of a widow raising children in the city. It is crucial to note that this passage arises in a chapter which involves a close reading of a series of literary portraits of women, by Rousseau and by the educational writer Thomas Day. The hapless widow whose plight Wollstonecraft fictionalises is one whose mother has read Rousseau's *Emile* (1762). This entire tableau must be considered part of Wollstonecraft's literary critique, because her social commentary is embedded within her literary commentary. After all, Wollstonecraft's widow 'only acts as a woman ought to act, brought up according to Rousseau's system' (*VRW* 3.118).

### **Recent Studies of Wollstonecraft's Literary Commentary**

In the final section of this introduction, I want to further contextualize Wollstonecraft's feminist argument within contemporary literary discourse, and to open a discussion with some recent commentators who have considered the literary commentary in *Rights of Woman* and in Wollstonecraft's other writings. Wollstonecraft expresses a common preoccupation amongst literary commentators of her time that certain forms of literature could influence, or possibly create, identity:

I may be accused of arrogance; still I must declare what I firmly believe, that all writers who have written on the subject of female education and manners, from Rousseau to Dr Gregory, have contributed to *render* women more artificial, weak characters, than they would otherwise have been; and consequently, more useless members of society. (*VRW* 2.91; my emphasis)

The term 'render' in reference to the effect of literature appears throughout *Rights of Woman*, and in the title of Chapter 5, which contains five literary reviews: 'Writers Who Have Rendered Women Objects of Pity'. Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary* (1755)

gives two definitions of the term 'render': 'To invest with qualities; to make' and 'To represent; to exhibit'. In other words, 'rendering' can be both prescriptive and descriptive. For Wollstonecraft, writers such as Rousseau do both; they describe women as 'weak characters', but their texts also work to persuade women to imitate the images therein:

I respect [Dr Gregory's] heart, but entirely disapprove of his celebrated *Legacy to his Daughters*. He advises them to cultivate a fondness for dress, because a fondness for dress, he asserts, is natural to them. I am unable to comprehend what either he or Rousseau mean when they frequently use *this indefinite term*. If they told us that in a pre-existent state the soul was fond of dress, and brought this inclination with it into a new body, I should listen to them with a half-smile, as I often do when I hear a rant about innate elegance. (VRW 2.97; second emphasis mine)

Despite the differences in historical context and literary genre of Wollstonecraft's targeted group of male writers, they all prescribe female identity through a disingenuous description of 'nature'. Wollstonecraft thus creates a transhistorical criterion by which to conceive of a tradition of 'male' writers, who, 'since the remotest antiquity', have been using 'invention to show' that woman 'ought to have her neck bent under his yoke' (2.95, cf. 107). From this point of view, any discussion of 'female rights and manners' must include a critique of literature.

In modern commentary on Wollstonecraft, the issue of literature and its ability to influence readers has most often been seen as part of the eighteenth-century concern with literary 'sensibility', the notion of a hyper-susceptibility in the reader and the corresponding power of certain types of literature to provoke and exploit this state. Wollstonecraft is explicitly involved in this debate, judging by her use of the term and her earlier engagement with sentimental novels as a reviewer for the *Analytical Review*. This is a phase of her career as literary critic that I examine in detail in Chapter 1 of this thesis. Rather than employing a set of commonplace epithets against sentimental literature, Wollstonecraft theorizes the influence of writing upon women by breaking it down into two components, the rhetoric of flattery, and the psychological theory of associationism. Wollstonecraft's understanding of the first of these as a feature of a literary tradition and the second as scientific theory of the mind anticipates modern writers. In *The Culture of Sensibility* (1992), G.J. Barker-



Benfield analyses these features at length, but does not clearly note that Wollstonecraft's theoretical stance prefigures his own. Wollstonecraft has anticipated modern commentary by analysing the historical and discursive components of literary sensibility separately, and she makes this analysis more explicit *Rights of Woman* than it had been in her earlier reviews for the *Analytical Review*.

Wollstonecraft's frequent use of the term 'render' is an anticipation of the modern concept of performativity. J.L. Austin defines 'performativity' as the power of certain utterances to 'actually perform an action', as in the initiation of a state of marriage with the words 'I do' (1432). Austin does not invest such utterances with independent power, but notes that it is only within a pre-existent legal or cultural framework that such words are taken to have this power. He insists that 'the convention invoked must exist and be accepted' (1433). From one feminist perspective, the category of performative utterances expands to include descriptions, and in particular, reiterated descriptions of women which are always performative not only of gendered behaviours, but of gender identity itself. Judith Butler states that 'there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results' (25). While Austin's account limits itself to the effects of individual utterances in narrowly defined circumstances, Butler sees gender identity as a product of language which purports to be a descriptive representation. Studies such as Nancy Armstrong's and Mary Poovey's draw upon this theory to provide an account of the way in which representations of women in literature of this period worked prescriptively, whether through representations of women as they appeared in novels and other narratives, or in the more explicitly prescriptive genres of advice. More recent studies, however, have seen women writers of the eighteenth century as capable of resisting the performative power of these representations.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> One example is Lucy Morrison's opening comment to her study of conduct books:

If women readers of the early nineteenth century had followed middle-class conduct books' guidance to the letter, they would have been demure and competent daughters, sisters, wives, and mothers who sacrificed any personal desires to those of any of their surrounding dependents. [...] What is more interesting, though, about the proliferation of conduct books at the turn of the nineteenth century is that it reveals while women recognized the duties and positioning traditionally dealt them, they subverted such constriction through publishing repeated redefinitions of it. (202)



Mitzi Myers, in her examination of Wollstonecraft's reviews for the *Analytical Review*, phrases the concept of performativity more colloquially: 'You are what you read' (88), a reiteration of Susan Gubar's comment.<sup>17</sup> Myers sees Wollstonecraft's concern with this phenomenon as part of a widespread anxiety of the time:

Eighteenth-century conservatives and radicals alike fretted over women and novels; this period's model of the reading experience stresses the exemplary force, for good or ill, of the fiction one imbibes (88).

This concern emerges early in the periodical culture which provides a part of Wollstonecraft's literary context. For example, a passage from the *Gentleman's Magazine* (1731) prefigures one of Wollstonecraft's key arguments about the effect of verbal interactions upon female subjectivity:

Girls from their cradles to maturity hear nothing but praises of themselves; their eyes are stars, their lips rubies, their teeth pearl, and their neck ivory; and are treated by men with a kind of worship and adoration. Is it then a wonder, if this continual flattery should turn their brains and *render* them ridiculous, fantastical, and conceited? The soul is of neither sex, and the only advantage the men have above the women is in bodily strength, all other difference between them is easily accounted for, if we consider their different education; but this fashionable flattering behaviour towards them supposes them downright idiots. ('Of Flattery' 1:519; my emphasis)

The use of the term 'render', in this passage from the *Gentleman's Magazine* of 1731, comes close to the concept that descriptions of women are performative of gendered subjectivities. We need not look far for the origin of this concept in Wollstonecraft's time, nor be limited to a Lockean source for her own theories. From

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Although Morrison's work is more a response to Nancy Armstrong than to Judith Butler, it is clear that she is arguing for the subversive potential in women's writing of this period. She is joined in this regard by numerous other feminist critics such as Anne K. Mellor and Joan Mulholland.

<sup>17</sup> Although her approach is restrictive in other respects, Susan Gubar considers *Rights of Woman* as 'feminist criticism' precisely because Wollstonecraft recognizes the performative function of literature:

From her meditations on the Bible and Milton's *Paradise Lost* to her interpretations of Pope's, Dr. Gregory's, and Rousseau's treatises, Wollstonecraft's analyses of debilitating female images assume that we are what we read and therefore these passages in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* constitute one of the earliest instances we have of feminist criticism. ('Misogyny' 455)

the perspective of Cartesian ontology, if the mind's activity is the sole proof of existence, then the manner in which women's minds are 'turned' actually determines their subjectivity.

Another aspect of this statement from the first year of the *Gentleman's Magazine* reflects the influence of late seventeenth-century feminism and seems indebted to Mary Astell. Astell employs the discourse of the 'sexless soul' to form her agenda, a religious discourse which she made compatible with Enlightenment rationalism. Indeed, Astell's thought is often described by modern feminist scholars as being able to coordinate extant religious thought and secular philosophy in her writings on women.<sup>18</sup> Barbara Taylor, in her important study on the connection between religion and eighteenth-century feminism, argues that the concept of the 'sexless soul', taken from traditional Augustinian theology,<sup>19</sup> is one which has been appropriated by generations of feminists to extrapolate other forms of equality (*Imagination* 99).

In the eighteenth century, the idea of the formative power of literature also drew from the theory of 'association'. Associationism, generally speaking, assumed that ideas in the mind organise themselves in configurations which correspond to the way in which sensory impressions are received. Subsequently, the purely mental faculty of reflection forms further 'associations' with already acquired ideas. These groups of ideas that are then fixed into new, rigid patterns. This theory can be traced to Locke's *Conduct of the Understanding* (1706), whose distinction between the ideas formed from initial sensory impressions and those which arise from an inner faculty of reflection provides the framework within which to understand the mechanism of 'association'. Locke claimed that ideas roamed the mind in 'gangs', that is, as associated concepts largely independent of the will. As Ernest Tuveson describes it:

In *The Conduct of the Understanding*, he [Locke] describes playful 'frisking' ideas that 'set up an annoying chiming in our heads.' An obsession may seize upon us ... like the sheriff with his posse. To the experiencing consciousness,

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<sup>18</sup> Ruth Perry has argued for the Cartesian and Baconian influence on the feminists of Astell's generation and beyond: 'Once put on an experiential basis, philosophy became the common intellectual ground on which men and women might meet to discuss the nature of thought and of physical matter' (476 et passim).

<sup>19</sup> This is drawn from the following: 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3:28).

ideas seem to be endowed with autonomy; one ‘comes into the understanding’ and the others, his associates, insist on coming along. (40)<sup>20</sup>

Locke’s account of psychological association was much more fully developed by David Hartley in *Observations on Man: His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations* (1749).

It is Hartley’s version that is brought into radical discourse later in the century by Joseph Priestley’s *Hartley’s Theory of the Human Mind, on the Principle of the Association of Ideas* (1775), most likely the source known to Wollstonecraft. Priestley describes the physiological basis of the theory and links it to the issue of innate ideas. As an extension of Locke’s epistemology, this concept of sensation was later deployed within Priestley’s political rhetoric in opposition to the Burkean claim that sentiments concerning the love of country and its ancient institutions were inborn.<sup>21</sup> Wollstonecraft’s debt to this theory is evident:

Everything that they [women] see or hear serves to fix impressions, call forth emotions, and associate ideas, that give a sexual character to the mind. [...] Besides, the books professedly written for their instruction, which make the first impression on their minds, all inculcate the same opinions. (*VRW* 6.186, 187)

In this passage, Wollstonecraft describes how associations can be induced in the young. She argues that notions such as ‘beauty’ are repeatedly associated with

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<sup>20</sup> *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (bk. 2, ch. 33, sec. 5).

<sup>21</sup> Priestley states that, ‘Sensibility, and the power of motion, seem to be conveyed to all the parts, in their natural state, from the brain and spinal marrow, along the nerves’ (7). In the introduction to the volume, he uses his own experience as an example:

I was myself educated so strictly and properly, that the hearing of the slightest oath, or irreverent use of the name of God, gives me sensation that is more than mental. It is next to shuddering, and thousands, I doubt not, feel the same; whereas other persons, and men of strict virtue and honour in other respects, I am confident, from my own observation, feel not the least moral impropriety in the greatest possible profaneness of speech. But by a different education I might have been as profane as they, and without remorse; and (with the same sensibility to impressions in general, though equally indifferent to them all) my education would have given them my exquisite sensibility in this respect. (*Hartley’s Theory* xlv)

For Priestley, it is not only aspects of the personality that are shaped experientially. Even a basic mental capacity, such as sensitivity to further impressions, can be developed through experience. Priestley’s method of communicating this theory is, significantly, by means of a personal narrative. Thus, if the author’s subjectivity is so integral to texts in many different genres, then a ‘personal’ literary criticism is one reasonable mode of analysing these texts, as I have mentioned in the above discussion of *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*.

physical and intellectual weakness through the purposeful actions of tutors, parents, and most notably in 'books of instruction'. These associations become the constituent elements of women's own conception of their identity, which are termed 'a sexual character'. Barbara Taylor argues that the theory of associationism allows Wollstonecraft to describe the formation of the character. Taylor remarks, 'The shaping of character in both sexes [...] results from a combination of innate disposition with "habitual associations of ideas" laid down in the mind prior to puberty' (*Imagination* 88; *VRW* 6.183). In this way, a contemporary scientific theory allows Wollstonecraft to firmly and explicitly link written texts to the shaping of 'a female character'.

Associationism was the scientific underpinning to the widely debated issue of how readers were influenced by texts, and the broad issue of the susceptibility to literature was embodied in the term 'sensibility'. As a generic noun, 'sensibility' meant simply a level of susceptibility to sense impressions, as it still does in modern romance languages. For eighteenth-century thinkers, 'sensibility' was part of a process by which a text could be imbued with the emotions of the author, which were then directly passed on to the sufficiently 'sensible' reader. Samuel Johnson worried that books could 'take possession of the memory by a kind of violence and produce effects without the intervention of the will' (*Rambler* 4:31). Johnson's concern with literary 'effects' seems to anticipate Wollstonecraft's concern with literary 'rendering'. Wollstonecraft quotes Johnson's definition of the term from his *Dictionary*: 'And what is sensibility? "Quickness of sensation, quickness of perception, delicacy"' (*VRW* 4.132).<sup>22</sup>

Barker-Benfield's *Culture of Sensibility*, a study of this discourse in eighteenth-century British culture, begins with Wollstonecraft as a particularly important critic of writers who encouraged the cultivation of sensibility:

Women, she [Wollstonecraft] argued, were acculturated to an exaggerated identification with "sensibility." Parents were fundamental to this process, but other key players were writers of both sexes. They argued on behalf of "the superiority of man." They argued it not simply in degree but in "essence."

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<sup>22</sup> It should be noted, however, that Johnson's frequently quoted statement is not in reference to literary sensibility in general, but to the specific literary device of the hero or moral exemplar, 'the power of example' (*Rambler* 4:31). Wollstonecraft, like Johnson, makes a consistent distinction between sensibility, which allows impressions to have their effect without the intervention of the will or of reason, and the influence of powerful exemplars, whether fictional or historical.

Wollstonecraft said that the reason they placed a high value on “feeling,” that is, she makes clear, on “sensibility” in women, was “to soften” this argument for essential male superiority. (1)

Barker-Benfield situates Wollstonecraft’s criticism of essentialism within a criticism of literary texts. Wollstonecraft recognises that writers do not simply offer an ‘argument’ for innate sexual differences, one that ought to be the subject of critical inquiry, but attempt to circumvent rational assessments by posing this argument in sentimental literary forms, attempting to persuade by means of the reader’s ‘sensibility’. Barker-Benfield sees Wollstonecraft’s concern with parents as separate from her concern with writers, but as I will show, Wollstonecraft sees parents themselves as subject to the powerful methods of certain writers, especially Rousseau. These parents then educate their daughters in such a way that their rational abilities remain undeveloped, and thus, become even more susceptible to prescriptive images of femininity in the books they are most likely to read. Wollstonecraft’s conceptualization of this chain of influence was not unique. Rousseau’s *Emile* was first sponsored by British periodicals at mid-century as a treatise especially meant to appeal to ‘preceptors and parents’.

Barker-Benfield notes that Wollstonecraft’s critique was drawn from a range of discourses, such as theories of associationism (18), as seen above. He also points out that Wollstonecraft distinguished between varieties of sensibility: ‘a sensibility governed by reason and a sensibility dangerously given over to fantasy and the pursuit of pleasure’ (361). In *Rights of Woman*, the moral ideal of a reasoned sensibility becomes a literary criterion:

[M]en, who, by their writings, have earnestly laboured to domesticate women, have endeavoured, by arguments dictated by a gross appetite [...] to weaken their bodies and cramp their minds. But, if even by these sinister methods they really *persuaded* women, by working on their feelings, to stay at home, and fulfil the duties of a mother and mistress of a family, I should cautiously oppose opinions that led women to right conduct [...]. (VRW 4.133)

For Wollstonecraft, the manner in which a moral lesson is learned is crucial and for this reason the genre and style of the didactic medium becomes the focus of acute criticism. Texts which are inspired by ‘gross appetite’ cannot, as a rule, dispense



proper moral strictures, but she insists that even if women could possibly be persuaded to adopt moral behaviours by reading seductive sensiblist writing, she would reject such a method. If morals are to be learned from texts, argues Wollstonecraft, then those texts must appeal to women's reason, and not their sensibility. Wollstonecraft concludes, 'I must again repeat, that sensibility is not reason' (*VRW* 4.134). Women should be 'persuaded' through their reason and not through their 'feelings'. This comment suggests that for Wollstonecraft literary languages are the primary media for the inculcation of gender norms.

Modern feminist studies have only recently given increased attention to the literary criticism of Mary Wollstonecraft, but even so, these have generally focused on her reviews for the *Analytical Review*, and few consider the literary critical components of *Rights of Woman*. Mary Waters gives special attention to the commercial aspect of Wollstonecraft's work for the *Analytical Review*, arguing that Wollstonecraft is the first professional female literary critic, and that her reviews are 'probably the earliest example of long-term regular reviewing by a woman in periodicals' (421). Waters also makes a case for Wollstonecraft as a mentor for other women critics, citing her encouragement of Mary Hays's work for periodicals (439). Myers, in her pioneering work on Wollstonecraft's literary reviews in the *Analytical Review*, sees the type of criticism which Wollstonecraft practices there as exemplary, inviting the female reader to adopt the same impatient resistance to 'shopworn images' of woman that she herself displays (89).

I argue that in *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft goes further. As I have indicated above, she describes the manner in which images of femininity pass from writer to writer, and then are disseminated in society both directly to readers and indirectly via a network of educators and parents who then inculcate sexual identities in young women – just one of the indirect means of 'forming' the 'female character' which Wollstonecraft mentions. Wollstonecraft's descriptions of how these effects occur over time, and permeate society at a given historical moment, that is, working diachronically and synchronically, offer the reader a theoretical view of literature, a view of the social matrix within which readers and writers can practice both private and public acts of critical intervention.

Wollstonecraft's closely read interpretations of Milton, Rousseau, and the conduct book writer John Gregory are examples of such interventions, but the text of *Rights*



of *Woman* is a virtual forum of interaction itself. With its juxtapositions of texts of various authors, including the embedding of Wollstonecraft's own moral tales, or 'sketches', within the texture of the prose, *Rights of Woman* dramatises how texts talk to each other. Amongst Wollstonecraft's shifting personae, from critic to moral fabulist to editor of materials, is included that of tutor, sitting by a student at a table with a pile of books, an iconic image frequently evoked, as we can see in the frontispiece to this thesis, depicting the earlier female critic Eliza Haywood.

A tableau of this type is visualised near the end of *Rights of Woman*, where Wollstonecraft describes her method of teaching: giving examples, having her student read various texts, all with a critical eye and 'a turn for humour' (*VRW* 13.258). In fact, over the course of the text, Wollstonecraft's educative persona shifts, as does her addressee. In *Rights of Woman* she sometimes addresses her reader as students, and sometimes presents her educational methods to *fellow* educators, reflecting the different audiences that *Rights of Woman* addresses.<sup>23</sup> But to go further, Wollstonecraft thematises interactions between authors and readers, presenting 'staged scenes of reading', to quote Tillotama Rajan's concept (11). Through the explicit discussion of how women read and what effects these reading habits have upon their self-perception, Wollstonecraft critiques the literary public itself. Wollstonecraft not only theorises the effects of reading upon a conjectural female reader. She also traces the influence of one text upon another by insisting that writers themselves, both men and women, are as susceptible to literature as the young female reader, whom Marilyn Butler describes as the central object of eighteenth-century 'critical solicitude' (*Romantics* 37). By shifting critical focus to writers, Wollstonecraft suggests that female readers might do the same.

## Plan of the Thesis

In Chapter 1 of this thesis, I analyze the historical and literary context in which Wollstonecraft practices literary criticism, and review the work of some contemporary women critics, who wrote in a great number of genres, as Terry Castle

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<sup>23</sup> Iain Pears points out that the simultaneous address to both elite and general audiences was a common feature of Enlightenment texts (431-32).

has pointed out. I discuss Wollstonecraft's work as a reviewer for the *Analytical Review*, with an eye to those elements which recur in *Rights of Woman*, and emphasize the possibilities which emerge from a longer and more permissive generic format. I include in this chapter a discussion of the collection and revision of texts, such as those practiced in anthologies and in the miscellany periodical of the period, and the relevance to the techniques of text-management in *Rights of Woman*. In Chapter 2 I examine Wollstonecraft's critique of Milton. Although brief in comparison to her lengthy discussion of Rousseau, this critique forms the template for how Wollstonecraft approaches other writers. Wollstonecraft's approach is two-tiered: She responds to the religious implications of Milton's view of woman with her own religious principles. Then, she employs a set of critical methodologies to analyze passages from *Paradise Lost*. Both Mary Poovey and Sandra Gilbert see Wollstonecraft's interaction with Milton as one marked by intimidation. In Gilbert's explicitly Bloomian paradigm, Milton 'darkens the page' of women's writing by being ever-present; even Wollstonecraft's attempt to revise Milton is itself a role within his epic poem.<sup>24</sup> For Poovey, symptoms of intimidation emerge in Wollstonecraft's use of quotations, which Poovey sees as an expression of deference to her canonical predecessor. I argue, however, that in making such assessments, we ought to consider textual practices that were extant in periodical forms of literary commentary, the forms most likely to be the source of Wollstonecraft's methods.

In the third chapter of this thesis, which focuses upon Wollstonecraft's critique of Rousseau's *Emile*, I again distinguish between Wollstonecraft's theoretical dispute with an author, and her extended use of literary criticism to make her case. First I analyze Wollstonecraft's claim that Rousseau's model of femininity is 'essentialist', that is, what she would term a doctrine of 'inborn' characteristics. Modern feminists have also made this claim, most notably Susan Moller Okin, who utilizes the former term. It is crucial to consider that Wollstonecraft's discussion only begins with the issue woman's essence, but primarily analyzes Rousseau's role in literary culture. In this sense, her engagement is not with the particular writer, nor with male superiority as an abstraction, but with a set of 'opinions' which she takes to be the source of the ideology of gender. This distinction between author and ideology becomes clear in a

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<sup>24</sup> I refer here to Harold Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence* (1973).

comment near the end of a critique that spans at least four chapters of *Rights of Woman*: 'I war not with his ashes, but his opinions' (5.161).

Wollstonecraft's literary critical techniques in her engagement with Rousseau are extensive. In Chapter 3 of *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft criticises passages quoted from *Emile* through close reading, as she does in her critique of Milton. She also juxtaposes lengthy passages from *Emile* with other quoted material, including her own moral tales. In this way, Wollstonecraft dramatises how the 'opinions' in *Emile* are disseminated in a literary sphere. Chapter 3 of *Rights of Woman* is a virtual forum of texts which bears some similarities to the miscellany periodical, and to the anthology, a genre which Wollstonecraft also mentions explicitly in the course of her critique. In contrast to the homogenising effect of many anthologies, especially those for women, the co-ordination of contentious texts in *Rights of Woman* asks the reader to make literary judgments rather than to acquiesce to the implied moral consensus of a homogenous collection. *Rights of Woman* displays a dense texture of allusion and quotation, and in the process Wollstonecraft's authorial postures alternate between those of critic, moralist author, and editor. Joan Mulholland has pointed out that the shifting locus of authority in itself calls attention to how authority is typically constructed, again offering the reader the possibility of critical involvement (187).

In Chapter 4, I examine Wollstonecraft's critique of John Gregory, one which is arguably her more challenging rhetorical performance, considering that Gregory was very popular, if not beloved. Wollstonecraft does not at first challenge Gregory's appeal, but ultimately claims that the link between Rousseau and Gregory is that they imbue women's public selves with an erotic identity. As seen above, Landes claims that this was constitutive of the public/private division at this time. Indeed, Landes's, and Elizabeth Wingrove's, analyses of Rousseau's *Letter to D'Alembert* (1758) convincingly demonstrate that, for Rousseau, women are to be marginalized from the public through the inculcation and enforcement of sexual self-consciousness. This usually took the form of 'modesty' or female 'virtue'. Modesty was the ubiquitous term for proper feminine avoidance of overt sexuality, which paradoxically evokes their sexuality all the more. Female 'virtue', a concept itself gendered, was seen as distinct from the republican male principle of virtue, and in many ways was considered its inverse. Female 'virtue' was configured as chastity and inaction, rather than the physically and morally proactive ideal this term represented for men.

Wollstonecraft makes evident the way in which sexual identities in the public sphere inhibit women's activities therein. From this perspective, she establishes a criterion by which female readers can judge texts such as Gregory's, not by his vaunted 'benevolence' or 'paternal solicitude', but by his acquiescence to the public pressure upon women to maintain their sexual identities. Despite his apparently good intentions, claims Wollstonecraft, Gregory himself views his daughters in a sexual light, and places himself amongst the ubiquitous group of male onlookers. She makes this evident by selecting passages from *A Father's Legacy*. If the unimpeachable Gregory can be shown to be complicit with Rousseau, then any author can be interrogated for his role in the repression of women. In the critique of Gregory, Wollstonecraft uses some of the techniques that I have discussed above, such as quotation, commentary, and comparison. She also interrogates authorial agency. To see Gregory as an unwitting follower of Rousseau is to subvert an optimistic narrative of literary progress. Rather than a reassuring image of 'canonized' writers delivering reliable wisdom, Wollstonecraft presents a dangerous 'medium of books'. However, she also provides a solution in the form of personal experience and the development of individual critical resources. To some extent, Wollstonecraft herself embodies the possibility of freedom, but also theorizes the roles of both public women critics and private women readers. Wollstonecraft as a critic claims a place in the literary sphere described by Habermas, while her analysis of how literature forms women's identities is a feminist critique of the sort made by Landes. In making this latter critique available to her women readers, Wollstonecraft exhorts them to resist these debilitating forces.

## Chapter 1

### The Development of Mary Wollstonecraft as a Literary Critic in the Context of Women's Critical Writing of the Mid- to Late Eighteenth Century

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#### 1.0 Introductory Section: New Approaches to Eighteenth-Century Women Critics

Women writers of the eighteenth century were not restricted to producing material that conformed to pre-existing generic categories; they in fact engaged in intellectual debates about the nature and limits of such categories. It was understood that while political stances could be expressed in any number of media, the particular medium chosen in itself implied a particular stance.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, theoretical discussions about literary categories themselves were also indications of particular political commitments. It was in this atmosphere of implicit and explicit debates concerning what today would be termed literary theory that Mary Wollstonecraft, in 1788, began reviewing books. She went on to incorporate a self-conscious discussion of literature and politics in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1792. Thus, in an overview of Wollstonecraft's conception of literature and literary criticism from her first writings to the publication of *Rights of Woman*, the scope of inquiry must include not only those specific methodologies that are employed in her reviews of books, but also her discussions of style, genre, and the agency of authors and of critics themselves. The purpose of this chapter is to examine Mary Wollstonecraft's development as a critic, primarily through an examination of her work for the *Analytical Review* in the period before the publication of *Rights of Woman*. Another aim here is to contextualize Wollstonecraft amongst women critics, and to demonstrate the level of awareness of their public roles.

The following discussion is several sections. The first is a survey of literary criticism by women in the mid to late eighteenth century. The second focuses upon

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<sup>25</sup> In the introduction, I cite Rita Felski's views on genre in social and political context (cf. 24-25). Here, I emphasize this perspective once again, one that is set out in the influential theoretical article by Carolyn Miller, 'Genre as Social Action'. Miller's argument is that genre should be seen not only as a set of formal, taxonomical properties, but as implicitly rhetorical: 'a genre becomes a complex of formal and substantive features that create a particular effect in a given situation' (25).



Wollstonecraft's reviews for the *Analytical Review*. The third section examines how the practices of the late eighteenth-century anthology, a form of literary mediation that is closely related to the more explicitly critical genres found primarily in periodicals, also contribute to Wollstonecraft's methods. The fourth looks at the increasing synthesis of literary and political elements in Wollstonecraft's reviews over time, and in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*. The final section concerns Wollstonecraft's self-situation amongst critics, and the connections between the reviews and *Rights of Woman*. Ultimately, the direct importation of some arguments and even some specific passages from the reviews into the more explicitly political *Rights of Woman* demonstrates that for Wollstonecraft, literary criticism and feminist argument are compatible, if not synonymous.

Women's writing of the eighteenth century is being reprinted and studied at an increasing rate. However, in the area of literary commentary by women, the process has been slower. As I have argued in the introduction, major anthologies, such as *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, still downplay Wollstonecraft's literary criticism, not to mention that of other women of the eighteenth century (cf. 27-29). The group of editors of *Women Critics: 1660-1820*, calling themselves the 'Folger's Collective', argued in 1995 that women were still underrepresented in histories of literary criticism. More surprising is that this remains one of the very few anthologies devoted solely to women's literary criticism of the eighteenth century.<sup>26</sup> One notable instance is *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* (1996), second edition, edited by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, which fails to adequately represent this dimension of women's writing of the eighteenth century. Elizabeth Eger remarks that this anthology offers 'a history defined by suppression and absence rather than professional presence' ('Fashioning' 205). Although *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* includes Elizabeth Wortley Montagu, Eliza Haywood, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, and Wollstonecraft, none of the literary commentary of these writers is reprinted therein.

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<sup>26</sup> For instance, James Engell's *Forming the Critical Mind: Dryden to Coleridge*, published in 1989 by Harvard University Press, does not contain a single female literary critic, nor are women served well in older 'standard' anthologies of literary criticism, such as *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950* (1955), by René Wellek.. The Folger group cites other anthologies of eighteenth-century women's writing which still only include the briefest samples of literary criticism: the *Meridian Anthology of Early Women Writers* (1987), Vivian Jones's *Women in the Eighteenth Century* (1990), and *The "Other" Eighteenth Century: English Women of Letters* (1991).



Part of the problem has been one of identification, as many of these materials are anonymous, found in unpublished letters, or simply not recognized as criticism. As Terry Castle has pointed out, women's literary criticism of the eighteenth century must be sought out in a very wide range of genres. Another challenge for the study of women's literary criticism is the persistence of traditional generic labels for works that have been in print for some time, as we have seen in the broad acceptance of Regina Janes's hypothesis concerning the genre of *Rights of Woman*. The recent expansion of critical attention, in the latter half of the twentieth century, to works outside the older limits of the canon should not only proceed by the recovery of wide range of women's writing of the eighteenth century, but also by the recognition that much of the material already in print needs to be reassessed.

Women writers of this time were conscious of the implicit political agendas that attached to various genres; they also displayed an awareness of the way in which their writing constructed a public self. This has been obvious for some time, but this self-awareness has been interpreted to imply that women wrote under conditions of intimidation. As we have seen in the introduction, Mary Poovey and Susan Gubar, amongst others, represent a scholarly perspective that women who entered the public sphere did so under very limiting norms of 'propriety', which placed strict controls on women's behaviour in public, especially upon literary expression. From this point of view, these controls were manifestations of a systemic repression of women in that the concept of 'public' was itself an essentially gendered one. This worked to place women outside of sites of effective political discourse, as Joan Landes argues. Although Landes's model is a welcome correction to Habermas's lack of extended inquiry into the role of gender in the formation of the public sphere, many scholars now assume that the terms 'public' and 'private' were so broadly understood in the eighteenth century that it can no longer be maintained that a gendered dichotomy of social spheres exerted overwhelming control over the writings, and other public activities, of eighteenth-century women.

A crucial article by Lawrence E. Klein is frequently cited to support this approach. In 'Gender and the Public/Private Distinction in the Eighteenth Century', Klein argues that the terms 'public' and 'private' cannot be seen as a mutually exclusive binary in the thinking of the eighteenth century, nor maintained as such in the historical examination of this period (97). He gives concrete examples from a

number of texts which illustrate the instability of this conceptual binary (106-09). The work of literary women of the eighteenth century in a number of genres, forms, and locations might have been systematically overlooked by modern critics who place too much stock in the public/private division, precisely because they have seen those genres, forms, and locations as marginal. Among the scholars and theorists who pursue the newer line of inquiry are Elizabeth Tavor Bannett, Elizabeth Eger, Mary Waters, Caroline Franklin, and Betty A. Schellenberg, all of whom have published studies since 2001. Schellenberg points out that reclamation of women's texts of the eighteenth century is only the first step in fully appreciating their potential:

I have come to believe that the problem now lies, not so much in a lack of evidence about these women's professional lives, but rather in our continued attempt to fit the evidence into habitual frames of reference; we need, to shift my metaphor, new wineskins in which to store our new wine. (Schellenberg 6-7)

Schellenberg's study examines the generation before Wollstonecraft's and demonstrates that women writers such as Sarah Scott, Francis Brooke, Sarah Fielding, and Charlotte Lennox were recognized literary professionals who each found numerous avenues to literary and political influence.

At the same time, as Mary Waters has pointed out, we cannot ignore the fact that there existed very real barriers for women who sought to write and work in the public sphere. She states, simply, 'One must not lose sight of the difference between, for example, petitioning parliament and serving in it, however public an activity petitioning might be' (*British* 14).<sup>27</sup> Here, it is useful to credit Habermas, who recognizes, if briefly, the gendered distinction between the political and extra-parliamentary publics.

[T]he "world of letters," where "privatized individuals in their capacity as human beings communicated through critical debate"; and the "political realm," where "private people in their capacity as owners of commodities communicated through rational-critical debate." (55-56)

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<sup>27</sup> This is the only citation of Waters from her book, *British Woman Writers and the Profession of Criticism, 1789-1832*. All other citations refer to her article, "'The First of a New Genus' [...]".

Habermas goes on to say that women most frequently occupy the first of these 'worlds' – the literary public sphere – and are 'factually and legally excluded' from the second. Joan Landes, as we have seen (cf. 20-21), greatly extends this distinction, but Habermas's model remains indispensable for distinguishing between a political public sphere, the area of actual legal and political decision-making, and a literary public.<sup>28</sup> While Lawrence E. Klein's article illuminates the multiplicity of strategies that existed for entering public forums, we should not lose sight of the fact that these strategies were made necessary by real social obstacles. Furthermore, the self-consciousness of women writers and their own theoretical understanding of social structures led to concrete policy positions regarding the status quo. Aside from explicit statements of these positions, the political beliefs of women writers manifested in distinct differences in their choices of genre, language, and agency. It is in this light that we can understand the interrelationship of, and contrasts between, women writers.

Women writers of this period used their literary authority to promulgate political and social agendas. The self-identification of late eighteenth-century women critics as social and political commentators is due in great measure to the spadework of the bluestockings, who had been active since the middle of the century. This intellectual community of women operated both in print and in conversational settings. Elizabeth Montagu, Elizabeth Vesey, and Frances Boscawen hosted salons and, in Montagu's case, patronized a series of women writers, including Catharine Talbot, Elizabeth Carter, Sarah Scott (Montagu's sister), and Hester Mulso Chapone.<sup>29</sup> A second generation of women intellectuals continued these practices, forming a self-identified network of arbiters of culture and politics well into the latter part of the century (Pohl and Schellenberg 1-3). Some women associated with the latter group are Catharine Macaulay, Clara Reeve, and Hester Thrale Piozzi.

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<sup>28</sup> Habermas also makes very clear that the political potential of the literary sphere is highly variable over time: 'We conceive bourgeois public sphere as a category that is typical of an epoch', and it cannot 'be transferred, idealtypically generalized, to any number of historical situations that represent formally similar constellations' (xvii).

<sup>29</sup> Elizabeth Vesey (1715-91), like Frances Boscawen (1719-1805), hosted the literary salons and is credited with coining the term 'bluestocking', a reference to the relatively informal attire of one male attendee, Benjamin Stillingfleet. Catherine Talbot (1721-70) was well-known for her *Reflections on the Seven Days of the Week* (1770). Montagu, Carter, Scott, and Chapone are discussed below, as are each of the 'second generation' bluestocking associates mentioned here.

The literary critical vocabulary of the bluestockings displays continuities with early eighteenth-century literary commentary. The bluestockings were interested in source study, focusing especially on Shakespeare's plots; their work sometimes echoes the rhetoric of the 'classics versus moderns' debate which occupied writers such as Jonathan Swift; and they invoked principles of classical criticism, such as the Aristotelian concept of 'the unities', brought into literary discourse by Addison in the *Spectator*. The 'unities', as they were often understood in neoclassical criticism of the eighteenth century, were rules concerning fictional plots, especially in dramatic works. For Addison, unity of action prescribed that there should be one central narrative of a 'strong' event, with few tangents. Unity of time prescribed that the action should occur within a twenty-four-hour span, and unity of place that the action not shift wildly between geographical locations. Addison presents his basic critical criteria in a discussion of *Paradise Lost* in *Spectator* no. 267 (2:537-44). Other principal criteria which adopted by the bluestockings are the plausibility of the characters and plots of fictional narratives, that is, the ideal of 'probability' over 'fancy', and the notion that the purpose of written texts is to inculcate good morals. As Anne K. Mellor reminds us, women critics of the late eighteenth century insisted that 'literature must above all be *probable* [...]. Only a work that is realistic, that represents convincing characters in quotidian settings undergoing plausible experiences, can function effectively to educate the reader' ('Criticism' 38). The literary critical criteria employed by these writers are simultaneously specialized and socially functional. Much of the critical apparatus of the earlier eighteenth century was readily available to women critics throughout the century, due to the constant anthologizing of extracts from the *Spectator* and other early sources of literary commentary. As we will see in the discussion of Clara Reeve, there was also a body of literary scholarship by women of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century that was revived and drawn upon by the bluestockings.

The primary figure amongst the bluestockings was Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, a wealthy woman who sponsored salons and supported fellow women writers. Montagu's *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespeare* (1769) is a book-length piece of literary criticism. In it, Montagu confirms Shakespeare as the 'national' poet of Britain. Linda Colley argues that nationalist discourse in this period operated by delineating a 'national character' through contrasts with the

supposed 'characters' of other nations, primarily the French (18-54). For Montagu, Shakespeare is superior to French writers because his characters' actions are heroic, moral, and believable, a set of attributes drawn from the neoclassical critical discourse briefly outlined above. Sarah Scott, Montagu's sister, wrote history and novels, and her work contains a distinct political orientation. She employs the republican overtones of country ideology in the 1760s, but is also an anti-Wilkesite (Kelly, 'Bluestocking' 173). Elizabeth Carter was highly regarded as a classical scholar, having published a translation of Epictetus, *All the Works of Epictetus* (1758), and several works of poetry and theology, albeit without attribution. Her translation was published anonymously but it was well known that Carter was responsible for the work, which enhanced her own reputation as well as that of the bluestockings ('Bluestocking' 175).

The bluestockings were not the first women commentators to employ a developed critical vocabulary in support of social and political agendas. Earlier women critics demonstrated an awareness of criticism as politically functional. Rather than descanting on the excellence of the 'national poet', Charlotte Lennox, in *Shakespeare Illustrated* (1753-54), condemns his morals by means of a close reading of *Measure for Measure*. Lennox was best known for her novel *The Female Quixote* (1752), a work which seeks to regulate the reading of young women, primarily through its cautionary moral message. At the same time this work is an assertion of Lennox's critical authority as it is a piece of acute commentary upon fictional genres. The main character Arabella is so lost in her reading of romances that she has lost her grip on reality. While she is being courted by a generically decent suitor, various complications and misapprehensions ensue, all of which due to her immersion in reading. Arabella interprets each mysterious event, each botched encounter or mishap as part of a tale of chivalry. She believes that she is surrounded by knights errant and evil dukes, and so forth. Arabella's reading curriculum, along with the fanciful imagination that it inspires, is subject to the ultimate test. The resolution of the plot, and her marriage, can only occur when she is persuaded to live in eighteenth-century Britain once more, as romances are presented as both dated and foreign. However, as Deborah Ross has pointed out, Lennox's strenuous denunciations of the romance are belied by the influence of the older genre upon *The Female Quixote*, which is 'both a romance and a satire of romance' (458). In a sense,



Arabella's imagination functions within the genre of romance while the moral trajectory of the narrative and the realist depiction of contemporary society identify the work as a novel, two elements that are to some extent synthesized.

Part of Arabella's great attraction to those who would reform her is her erudition, which is not in the end erased but redirected. Thus, Lennox values the acquired complexity of the female reader's consciousness, but outward social behaviours are another matter altogether. Arabella is only acceptable as a suitable wife once her reading habits are brought into conformity, and she agrees to fulfil traditional wifely duties. Thus, Lennox's extraordinary coordination of genres serves as a form of sophisticated literary commentary, but finally resolves itself so as to support one of the 'moral' aims of reading. Just as Addison borrows a classical vocabulary in order to promote a broad educational agenda, the conclusion of *The Female Quixote* reassures its readers that the potentially destabilizing reading habits of women can be controlled. In addition, an anticipation of Montagu's nationalist theme is suggested in the association of the novel with the English and the romance with the French.

In *Shakespeare Illustrated*, Lennox chose the generic vehicle of the literary essay to make the same basic points as she had in her novel, though here the critical agenda is explicit. Employing a method of close reading of individual texts, Lennox evaluates Shakespeare in terms of the two primary literary ideals that were implicit in her novel, 'probability' and moral instrumentality. She argues that in *Measure for Measure*, Shakespeare does not adequately punish 'Vice'. Angelo 'debauches a virgin' and intends to kill her brother, but successfully pleads for forgiveness. He does not receive his just 'measure', as the title promises (132). Shakespeare's effort is 'greatly below the Novelist' (126) because it would be both realistic and moral, claims Lennox, for crime to receive just punishment. In making this claim, Lennox employs a theory of Addisonian unities, complaining that the narrative is 'load[ed] with useless Incidents, unnecessary Characters, and absurd and improbable Intrigue' (126). Lennox's writing was known to Wollstonecraft, who mentions *The Female Quixote* with approval in a review in 1790 (*AnRev* 308).

*The Morality of Shakespeare's Drama Illustrated* (1775), by Elizabeth Griffith, employs a similar set of criteria and analytical techniques as Lennox, but Griffith insists that a study of Shakespeare is excellent moral training for young readers. Ignoring her predecessor, she invokes the authority of Samuel Johnson, claiming that



'he is the only one who has considered Shakespeare's writings in a moral light' (117). Contrary to Lennox, Griffith asserts that Shakespeare's narratives are indeed probable:

His anatomy of the human heart is delineated from *nature*, not from *metaphysics*; referring immediately to our intuitive sense, and not wandering with the schoolmen, through the pathless wilds of theory. (*Morality* 117)

The particular Enlightenment rhetoric used here, a Cartesian condemnation of medieval theorizing, was anachronistic in 1775, indicating Griffith's willingness to draw on older discourses. Nevertheless, she shares the literary criterion of 'probability' with Lennox, even if she comes to a different assessment of Shakespeare.

Griffith moves from work to work rather than following a single text closely, quoting and framing shorter passages within her commentary. Her selective reading practice allows her to take greater liberties with interpretation than had Lennox. For example, she quotes Shylock's monologue in *The Merchant of Venice*, in which he defends his vengefulness by declaring that he, like Christians, can be infuriated by personal injustice: 'If you prick us, do we not bleed?' (qtd. in 119). This, claims Griffith, is proof that the Christian ethic of 'universal charity' is recognized even by Jews, because, apparently, Shylock holds Christians to this standard. This interpretation is by no means obvious and Griffith admits that the moral here is only 'indirectly inculcated in the Jew's speech' (119). In other words, this aspect of Shakespeare's text can only be made apparent through Griffith's intensive textual interventions. The contrast between Lennox and Griffith is helpful in sourcing Wollstonecraft's critical methods because they represent different methodologies by which to analyse texts. While the basic criterion of probability remains constant in most commentary of this period, one critic quotes longer passages and employs close reading in order to question stylistic choices, while the other fragments texts in order to carry out her moralist interpretation. Wollstonecraft employs similar practices in *Rights of Woman*.

Women writers of the eighteenth century self-consciously situated themselves in print culture, and in the process constantly assessed the roles of other literary women. Susan Staves points to these interactions:

While they were generally eager to support the work of their sister writers, [...] late eighteenth-century women writers also exercised critical judgment. They described what faults of substance or style they discerned in other women's writing and they reserved the right to differ over important matters of religion, politics, or class. (438)

The Folger Collective, likewise, notes the intertextual nature of women's criticism (xvii). What Staves and other modern critics underemphasize, or simply overlook, is the ability of these women to *also* theorize about literature. In the brief passage above, Staves assumes that the issue of 'style' was conceived of as separate from socio-political debate, but ultimately, many women writers saw style, as it was manifest in literary genre, as a form of political discourse. Through a display of literary critical virtuosity and the theoretical discussion of rhetorical media itself, many women writers claimed a form of public authority.

It is through a discussion of issues such as genre that the literary authority of the bluestockings was established and then deployed in the service of political and social agendas. As we have seen in the case of George Walker's *Vagabond*, radicals were accused of infusing any genre with politics (cf. 26-27). Hannah More develops this line of argumentation in *Strictures on Female Education*, where she comments on women's reading by making an essentially theoretical point:

It ['Christianity'] calls upon them [women] to banish from their dressing rooms, (and oh, that their influence could banish from the libraries of their sons and husbands!) that sober and unsuspected mass of mischief, which, by assuming the plausible names of Science, of Philosophy, of Arts, of Belles Lettres, is gradually administering death to the principles of those who would be on their guard, had the poison been labelled with its own pernicious title. But who suspects the destruction which lurks under the harmless or instructive names of *General History*, *Natural History*, *Travels*, *Voyages*, *Lives*, *Encyclopedias*, *Criticism*, and *Romance*? (1:30)

More seeks to police the gender of genre by suggesting that certain texts could be dangerous to the chastity of the female reader. The fact that this is required by 'Christianity' is a subversion of Wollstonecraft's use of Dissenting theology to legitimize women's equal right to intellectual self development. More's is no commonplace call for women to stop reading dangerous material that might 'destroy' their virtue, one which would routinely name novels as the cause of moral

corruption. More presents an overview of print culture itself, and sees the problem as one of the categorization and segregation of genres.

Clifford Siskin has theorized that the increase in the categorization and specialization of knowledge in this period operated through the gendering of categories of knowledge:

[T]he division of knowledge in the eighteenth century was informed by divisions of gender. Modern disciplinarity, that is, was not first constituted and then later altered by gender difference; rather, that system has functioned from its inception to articulate and enact those differences. (*Work* 55)

More's stance seems to bear out Siskin's thesis, who presents women writers as uniformly complying with the trend of increasing specialization, and with one of the most productive conceptual categories of all, the author. He quotes the opening of Eliza Haywood's *Female Spectator* to make this point: 'I, for my own part, *love* to get as well acquainted as I can with an Author, *before* I run the risque of losing my Time in perusing his *Work*' (1:1). Siskin draws upon Foucault's insight into the term 'author' as a means of categorizing written texts (Siskin 162).<sup>30</sup> Siskin focuses upon Haywood's use of the verb 'love' to claim that the individualist critical perspective was a form of 'naturalized desire' thereby drawing a connection between eroticised gender and reading as an act of forming literary categories. Yet what is missed here is that while eighteenth-century writers may have been attracted by gendered representations of the author, they also debated the issue of textual mimesis, that is, whether text transparently reflected an author's consciousness, and *whether* the work should thus be interpreted by means of available biographical data, and vice versa. In short, Haywood's is a *proposed* interpretive stance, and no matter how widespread this interpretive stance became, it was not an unconscious and ubiquitous one. Likewise, while More insists on the gendered division between genres, her very discussion of the fact demonstrates that the matter is, and has been, up for debate. For Haywood, the term 'love' may, as Siskin reads it, signal desire, but could also signal choice. Perhaps what Haywood is stating is that other readers do not, in fact, access the text by means of the author, but that they ought to.

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<sup>30</sup> Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?' *NTC* 1622-36.

Siskin also mentions Wollstonecraft, briefly, but only to note her conformity with the commonplace view of literature as educative. He notes that, like Mary Astell and Haywood, she employs the organic metaphor of 'cultivation' to describe education, which is actually a description of the delineation and formation of individual consciousness (57). Siskin ties this to a historical trend, and cites Astell's and Haywood's uses of a similar organic metaphor as evidence. To be sure, Siskin's thesis of the increasing specialization and gendering of categories of knowledge is well taken, as is his argument that this served to marginalize women's texts, a process he calls 'engendering' (55). However, it is curious that his own text 'engenders' *theoretical* self-consciousness: Women writers in *The Work of Writing* appear as complicit enablers of historical trends, while at least one male writer appears as a resistant theorist. Siskin spends much time on Godwin's unpublished text, 'Of History and Romance', certainly an interesting piece of genre criticism which questions the constructed value of historical fact relative to the supposed unreliability of fiction (170-71). However, Siskin does not examine Clara Reeve's published and influential *Progress of Romance* (1785), a more extended study of genre than Godwin's, nor does he note Wollstonecraft's own commentary on history and biography, discussed below.

In fact, women writers took differing theoretical positions regarding the political implications which attached to issues of authorial agency, the receptive psychology of the reader, and genre. More's comment, for example, is both theoretical and contentious, occasioned by her familiarity with the activities of her perceived opponents, including Wollstonecraft. Although never mentioned by name in the *Strictures*, Wollstonecraft appears in obvious allusions: '[T]he imposing term of *rights* has been produced to sanctify the claim of our female pretenders' (2:20). In addition, More accuses her opponents of generic promiscuity, and cautions women against the reading of anthologies, and of unsupervised reading of journals (2:58). These comments should be borne in mind when assessing the different genres that appear in *Rights of Woman* as expressions of Wollstonecraft's psychology rather than as a recognized stylistic feature of radical writing (cf. 2-3). Wollstonecraft's generic scope in *Rights of Woman*, not only in her own stylistic range but in the range of texts she engages, is clearly influenced by the expansive reading practices of the

periodical reviewer, as well as by the awareness that intense intertextuality was itself indicative of a political stance.

By making her case from within a conduct book, More's complaint appears at some remove from direct commentary upon affairs of state, such as we might find in Anna Laetitia Barbauld's tracts concerning the legal restrictions upon Dissenters that were being debated in the House of Commons from 1788-90, discussed in more detail below.<sup>31</sup> More seems to adhere to the norms of public female speech by writing about politics only obliquely. In the passage above, the influence of literature upon men is mentioned in parentheses and in a supplicating tone. This would seem to reinforce Poovey's claim that 'women created opportunities for self-expression through strategies of indirection, obliqueness, and doubling' (42) rather than supporting Klein's or Schellenberg's image of the intrepid literary professional. From Poovey's point of view More is both the product and promulgator of restrictive gendered norms of expression: 'Hannah More identified the habit of intellectual indirectness as characteristically feminine. To her, it was a "natural" rather than a learned response' (42). But More claims both literary *and* political authority by another route, and if it is indirect, her claim is by no means modest.

In the introductory section of *Strictures*, More declares that the health of the state rests upon the character of women and their 'influence' upon men:

[O]n the use, I say, which they shall hereafter make of this influence, will depend, in no low degree, the well-being of those states, and the virtue and happiness, nay perhaps the very existence of that society. (1:4-5)

Although More makes much of her abhorrence of Rousseau (1:31-3), the principle she invokes here is indebted to his theories concerning the role of women in society, especially as found in *Emile* and *The Letter to D'Alembert*. In these works, Rousseau builds upon the prevalent the assumption, found in Addison and in Scottish Enlightenment writing, that women 'civilise' men by smoothing their rough edges. Rousseau places women at the very heart of the ideal republican society. It is this central role which More emphasizes, because it is precisely the role that the

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<sup>31</sup> She makes it clear that most critical expression is unfeminine:

Do we wish to enthrone them in the professor's chair, to deliver oracles, harangues, and dissertations? to weigh the merits of every new production in the scales of Quintilian, or to regulate the unities of dramatic composition by *Aristotle's clock*? (*Strictures* 2:46)



bluestockings and their descendants, such as More herself, attempted to establish for themselves.

Gary Kelly discusses this issue in his study of bluestocking women, in which he stresses their role as mediators between social classes. He notes that David Hume, in 'Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences', had developed the notion of women as mediators of polite culture, a longstanding cultural notion (*Essays* 134). In 'Of Essay Writing', Hume puts special emphasis on literate women:

[A]ll men of sense, who know the world, have a great deference for their [women's] judgment of such books as lie within the compass of their knowledge, and repose more confidence in the delicacy of their taste, though unguided by rules, than in all the dull labours of pedants and commentators. (qtd in Kelly 'Bluestocking' 166; Hume *Essays* 570-71)

Kelly argues that Hume, writing here before the major works of the bluestocking circle had been published, 'anticipates' their claims of public authority, claims which were grounded upon the function of 'civilizing' men ('Bluestocking' 166). However, Hume's claim of an essentially instinctive female taste as mutually exclusive of a rational or systematically analytical apparatus is not a major feature of bluestocking writing, nor indeed of most women's criticism of the late eighteenth century. Bluestocking criticism is characterized by appeal to longstanding aesthetic standards and to a rational critique of literary genre, style, and source, putting them closer to Hume's 'pedants and commentators' than to his feminine mediators of culture, who traffic only in 'delicacy'.

Rousseau's paradigm of the indispensable social role of woman is a more powerful influence upon the thinking of some literary women later in the century, judging by More's insistence that the fate of the nation rests upon women's virtue.<sup>32</sup> For Hannah More, as for Rousseau and other earlier thinkers, because the education and morals of women stand at the heart of political society, female reading habits are ultimately a political matter. According to Irmgard Maassen, female identity was the 'cultural underpinning' to the emerging middle-class economy. Thus, the regulation of both literature and women's reading became a source of great anxiety (172-74). It

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<sup>32</sup> Helena Rosenblatt argues that Rousseau's anxiety about meddling salon women should be seen in a specific political context; when he rails against public literary women in *Letter to D'Alembert*, it is because he equates salon culture with the dangerous influence of French culture upon local republican politics (Rosenblatt 101-11), an issue I examine in Chapter 3.



was all the more imperative to limit and direct their reading, which itself was crucial in any program of forming women, in that women were now plainly identified as embodiments of cultural identity, both symbolically and in their actual roles as educators of the young. In a significant irony, Hannah More appropriates Rousseau's social doctrine which was explicitly configured *against* female intellectual expression to enhance her own social status as a literary and moral theorist, one that took a position in a hierarchy of women. The role of public, literary women who could help control the flow of new texts stood a tier above the individual mothers, tutors, and other guardians who are warned against certain reading practices. Hannah More's authority is enhanced by revisions of earlier male social theories of woman's place, in a sense displacing the cultural authority of writers such as Rousseau and Hume themselves. If individual women in their roles as educators and civilizing helpmates are so important to the health of the nation, then an arbiter of women's reading, knowledge, and upbringing emerges as a powerful figure indeed.

The bluestockings' claim of public authority based on literary knowledge was a form of agency that was crucial to *Rights of Woman*, in which Wollstonecraft embodies the established role of the female critic in mediating literary texts to a wide audience of both impressionable readers and fellow intellectuals. However, the women writers mentioned here, and those examined in more detail below, were not the only influence upon Wollstonecraft's critical practice. She also drew heavily from the practices of periodical culture and from the political essay. This creates a tension in Wollstonecraft's work between one form of literary authority that is already associated with women, and another that was gendered male. But Wollstonecraft's criticism in *Rights of Woman* does not fall so easily into gendered categories, which were unstable and contested. As we have seen, women's literary criticism, in a variety of forms, found its way across the gendered divisions of literary genres. Thus, Wollstonecraft draws upon various critical traditions to establish her authority as a critic amongst both men and women critics. She comments extensively not only on women's texts, but upon their approach to literature. Just as we have seen Hannah More attempting to regulate both the reading and the writing of others, Wollstonecraft's feminist politics in *Rights of Woman* require a series of judgments of women along with her primary focus upon male writers.

### 1.1 *The Analytical Review*, a Critical Vocabulary

The critical tools that became available to Wollstonecraft were acquired by familiarity with a large body of writing in a number of genres, both through her immersion in periodical culture, and in the context of established practices of women critics. Upon arriving in London in 1788, Wollstonecraft began working for Joseph Johnson, who would publish all of her works. When she became a regular writer for *The Analytical Review*, she was, in Mary Waters's estimation, the 'first professional female literary critic' for whom literary reviewing was the primary source of financial support (cf. 38). Wollstonecraft must have been aware that other women, such as Hester Chapone, Charlotte Lennox, and Charlotte Smith, all earned money from writing, as these writers are mentioned in her earliest reviews. In addition, Joseph Johnson's publishing history shows that he was already paying other women writers for their publications, something that Wollstonecraft would very probably have known. Johnson had published nine titles by Anna Laetitia Barbauld between 1773 and 1788 before her first political tract in 1790. Also published by Johnson are Mary Scott's *The Female Advocate* (1774), Madame Cambon's *Young Grandison* (1790), translated by Wollstonecraft, and Sarah Trimmer's *Little Spelling Book* (1791).<sup>33</sup> Amongst Johnson's later contracted writers are Mary Hays, Priscilla Wakefield, Elizabeth Hamilton, and Maria Edgeworth.<sup>34</sup> Thus, Wollstonecraft's frequently quoted boast to her sister, that she was 'the first of a new genus' (*Letters* [1787] 165), can be considered a self-conscious statement not that she is the first woman to earn money from writing, but that she is distinct from her predecessors in writing literary commentary on a regular basis for pay. Her subsequent statement to

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<sup>33</sup> Barbauld's publications with Johnson are *Miscellaneous Pieces in Prose* (1773), with Barbauld's brother John Aikin, *Poems* (1773), published under her unmarried name Anna Laetitia Aikin, *Devotional Pieces* (1775), *Lessons for Children* (1778-88), comprising five titles, and *Hymns in Prose for Children* (1781). Mary Scott (1751-93) was also a Dissenter and published her first title with Johnson. Maria Gertruida Cambon was a Dutchwoman who wrote on science and religion.

<sup>34</sup> Mary Hays, *The Victim of Prejudice* (1799); Maria Edgeworth, *Letters for Literary Ladies* (1795), *Castle Rackrent* (1800), and *Belinda* (1801).

George Blood, another recipient of her generosity, that she would 'clear above two hundred pounds', suggests that she was routinely referring to herself as a literary professional (*Letters* 177).

By 1792, the year in which *Rights of Woman* was published, Wollstonecraft had written a novel, a conduct book, two book-length translations – one from French and the other from German – the political work *Rights of Men*, and most likely had some editorial involvement with the anthology, *The Female Reader*.<sup>35</sup> By December 1791, when she completed *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft had already written over 360 reviews for the *Analytical Review*, not counting some whose attribution is still unclear. Modern doubts about the authorship of the large number of reviews that appear in the complete works edition published by Pickering and Chatto in 1989, edited by Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, have almost completely subsided, as Mitzi Myers points out ('Reviews' 82-83; cf. Appendix A). The attribution of the reviews is further consolidated when we consider that several of Wollstonecraft's judgments of particular texts, and even the quotation of the identical passages from those texts, are imported in only slightly altered form into *Rights of Woman*. Two examples that appear below are the review of Thomas Day's *Sandford and Merton* (1783), and Hester Thrale Piozzi's *Journey through France, Italy, and Germany* (1789). Wollstonecraft's views of Rousseau, which gradually shift, nevertheless take a recognizable trajectory from her earlier reviews to *Rights of Woman*.

Wollstonecraft's professional standing is in clear contrast with the public personas of the bluestockings. Wollstonecraft's literary work was her sole source of income, and she did not depend on patronage or a network of women for support in lean times, as was the case with Lennox and with Elizabeth Carter (Guest 'Bluestocking' 69). She relied on Johnson for material assistance, as the letters from 1788-89 show, but this was also economically quite favourable for Johnson, who was eventually able to capitalize on his early support of Wollstonecraft (Todd *Revolutionary* 128-89). A reading of the letters of this time shows a strong personal connection between Wollstonecraft and Johnson, but also the importance, at least for Wollstonecraft, of maintaining financial autonomy, hence the frequent requests for an exact tally of her debt (*Letters* 177-79) and the assumption of a large range of literary tasks. Of the

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<sup>35</sup> I dispute the attribution of this anthology to the sole editorship of Mary Wollstonecraft. Appendix A is a brief essay on this topic.

numerous women who produced literary commentary in the eighteenth century, few wrote periodical material on a regular basis over a number of years. As we will see below, Frances Brooke in the *Old Maid* (1755-56), Eliza Haywood in the *Female Spectator* (1744-46), and Charlotte Lennox in the *Ladies Museum* (1760-61) were Wollstonecraft's predecessors as periodical writers. Work is ongoing in recovering a number of anonymous periodical pieces by Elizabeth Griffiths, and, in the later period, Barbauld, Mary Hays, and others. However, it does appear that Wollstonecraft had the most sustained production of literary reviews over time, as well as a very broad range of texts reviewed, and in this sense she was correct in her boast of being 'the first of a new genus'.

Joseph Johnson and Thomas Christie launched the *Analytical Review* in 1788. Mary Waters points out that Wollstonecraft did not simply write by individual assignment but was involved in the planning and editing of this publication from the start (420-21). The editors of the *Analytical Review* made protestations of its objectivity and disinterested professionalism ('Prospectus' iii; cf. 127), but, according to Barbara Benedict this periodical was plainly recognized as a vehicle of Dissenting and radical thought ('Readers' 10-12).<sup>36</sup> Sympathizers with the French Revolution and advocates for political reform in Britain, such as Richard Price, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, and William Frend, either wrote for the *Analytical* or were praised in its reviews. Claims of objectivity were also belied by the obvious political and religious commitment of Johnson himself.

It is not unusual for a periodical in the early 1790s to contain explicit religious and political overtones. Apart from his oversight of the *Analytical*, Johnson had been active in publishing the work of his political associates. Johnson had published Richard Price's speech, *Discourse on the Love of Our Country* (1790), in which Price claims that the American war and French Revolution are part of the same inevitable progress towards universal political reform begun by the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688-89. Upon the appearance of Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), Johnson encouraged Wollstonecraft to respond within weeks with *A*

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<sup>36</sup> Benedict gives a useful thumbnail sketch of the political sympathies of the major periodicals towards the end of the eighteenth century. This is a partial list with founding editors and dates: Richard Phillips's *Monthly Magazine* (1796), Jacobin; Smollett's *Critical Review* (1756), Tory; E. Cave's *Gentleman's Magazine* (1731), generally conservative; Ralph Griffith's *Monthly Review* (1749), Whig and later Dissenting; George Channing's *Anti-Jacobin* (1796), Tory and reactionary.

*Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790). In the years 1787 to 1790, the Dissenters were in the midst of their latest struggle to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts, sets of legal restrictions enacted at the settlement of 1689 for most non-Anglicans. The Acts excluded them from most civil posts and from attending Oxbridge.<sup>37</sup> Johnson's efforts were an important part of the Dissenters' strategy to gain sympathy and support for the repeal.<sup>38</sup> Aside from Johnson's explicit politics, the *Analytical* functioned, as did most periodicals of the time, as a means of maintaining a level of public interest in the publisher's commercial stock, or those of a 'conger' of publishers, a loose commercial association (Benedict 'Readers' 20). The practice of writing positive reviews for commercial reasons was known as 'puffing'. Wollstonecraft's reviews dealt with novels, the heart of the print market, but also travelogues, history, treatises on the arts, conduct books, and many other genres. In this way, the generic range of books reviewed by Wollstonecraft reflected the commercial function of the *Analytical Review*. At the same time, the wide scope of genres brought into the politicized periodical was seen as a radicalization of literature, as the passage from Hannah More's *Strictures* makes clear.

The criteria and discourses which populated Wollstonecraft's early literary commentary coincided in some ways with the critical concerns of the bluestockings, and I will briefly review these here before going on to examine particular examples. The overriding literary criterion for Wollstonecraft, as for the bluestockings, is whether texts inculcate proper moral values, or 'virtues', in readers, especially young female readers. The question of how readers are affected by written texts leads Wollstonecraft to contrast a form of susceptibility, or 'sensibility', which is automatic in the manner outlined in theories of associationism, with one that is self-conscious and assisted by reason. After the earliest reviews, Wollstonecraft began to

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<sup>37</sup> It should be noted, however, that William Frend must have sworn to the Anglican articles of faith because his first publication was written as a student at Cambridge. Of course, he was ejected for the heterodox principles of *Peace and Union, Recommended to [...] Republicans and Anti-Republicans* (1793).

<sup>38</sup> I am indebted to Isaac Kramnick's *Republicanism and Bourgeois Radicalism* for a description of the way in which the religious views of the Rational Dissenters enabled their commercialist and political programmes, as I am to G.M. Ditchfield's 'The Parliamentary Struggle [...]', which documents the strategies of the Dissenters and their allies regarding the votes in the Commons on the Test Acts in 1787, 1789, and 1790. The failure of this initiative has been seen by H.T. Dickinson as the cause of the radicalisation of at least some of the Dissenters (*Radicalism* 4).



question whether the exemplary models offered to young female readers in particular ought to be static, finished exemplars, or whether these models should be in the process of forming their morals. She discussed biography and autobiography, contrasting these genres with antiquarian modes of history. In her judgments of literary collections, Wollstonecraft expected these to be organized and homogeneous, and to have particular educative aims. At the same time, the use of quoted text in her reviews was marked by a practice of contrast and contention. Perhaps the most obvious shift in Wollstonecraft's criticism, apart from her ideas considering female role models, was the explicit manner in which politics entered the reviews, and, in the case of *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, how literary criticism was employed in her politics. Like the bluestockings, Wollstonecraft utilized literary critical discourse as a means for establishing an authoritative public persona, but in *Rights of Men*, the connection between literary expertise and a political stance is more explicit than in most writings of the bluestockings. In her letters and reviews, Wollstonecraft occasionally noted the social power and role of the literary critic, as well as the relative strengths of competing periodicals. In short, Wollstonecraft was already fully embedded in literary culture within two years of the start of her career as a literary critic.

The most obvious critical criterion in Wollstonecraft's reviews is that of the moral instrumentality of literature, but this aspect of her critical practice undergoes a shift before 1792. In the eighteenth century, the term 'moral' could apply both to what is right to do, and to what is commonly done. This is the manner in which Rousseau uses the term *moeurs*, which was translated into English as 'morals'. Alan Bloom's translation of *Emile* translates *moeurs* as 'morals' with 'manners' in brackets in order to reflect the wider semantic range of the former term in the eighteenth century. However, the interchangeable use of the terms was less due to a conflation of meaning than the implied principle that human behaviour is meant to reflect timeless principles. In *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft makes this clear when she distinguishes the two terms: 'Manners and morals are so nearly allied that they have often been confounded; [...] the former should only be the natural reflection of the latter [...].' (*VRW* Ded.66). Here, Wollstonecraft is preparing the ground for one of her critical themes, that of the corrupt public behaviours of over-effeminized women. Her critique extends to soldiers and kings, who, she argues, borrow their manners



from the imitation of peers and the acquiescence to superficial and temporal public expectations rather than from a 'natural' inner source of morals. Throughout Wollstonecraft's works, the content of her moral prescriptions shifts, but not the paradigmatic assumption that social behaviours should ideally reflect immutable principles.

From the start of her career, Wollstonecraft was concerned with the effect of novels upon the morals (and manners) of the impressionable, or overly 'sensible', reader. As Mitzi Myers has pointed out, it was the assumption that texts had 'exemplary force' of instilling morals which opened them to moralist criticism. Novels in particular were singled out in this way ('Reviews' 88; cf. 33). This is evident in one of Wollstonecraft's earliest reviews, that of Charlotte Smith's *Emmeline* (1788). This novel employs the stylistic elements of the gothic and of sensiblist writing. Its alleged departure from the ideal of probability, in both plot and in the depiction of the emotions of particular characters, provokes Wollstonecraft's corrective response. Emmeline is orphaned, and becomes the ward of her uncle, Lord Montreville, who leaves her to the care of a housekeeper. Emmeline educates herself through intensive study in Montreville's private library. A love interest develops with Mr Delamere, Montreville's son, but Emmeline is whisked away by Montreville, who objects to the match. After a series of adventures and pursuits, her inheritance is discovered, and all obstacles to the marriage are cleared away.

In the review, Wollstonecraft attacks the novel on its moral (de)merits, by way of a discussion of reader receptivity. *Emmeline* is full of 'preposterous sentiments our young females imbibe', sentiments which lead young women to neglect their 'duties' (*AnRev* 26). Wollstonecraft's notion of the susceptibility of the reader is part of the belief in associationism (cf. 34-36), a perspective the critic shared with the novel author. Because the issue of reading was foremost in the public consciousness, the early education of characters, and in particular the reading habits of *female* characters, were indispensable features of all fictional narratives. Thus, criticism of these features of fictional characters was simultaneously a debate with the author over issues of education and reading.

The passive reader, who 'imbibes' sentiments 'without the intervention of the will', as Samuel Johnson had put it, is a parallel to passive literary characters, such as

the particularly emotional Lady Adelina, who features in a tearful scene of repentance:

Lady Adelina is indeed a character as absurd as dangerous. Despair is not repentance, nor is contrition of any use when it does not serve to strengthen resolutions of amendment. The being who indulges useless sorrow, instead of fulfilling the duties of life, may claim our pity, but should never excite admiration; for in such characters there is no true greatness of soul, or just sentiments of religion; indeed this kind of sorrow is rather the offspring of romantic notions and false refinement, than of sensibility and a nice sense of duty. (*AnRev* 27)

Adelina's extremes of emotions are made possible by 'romantic notions', presumably acquired through the sort of education and reading that this same novel exemplifies. Wollstonecraft's comments assume that novels can affect young female readers in different ways; first, by the communication of feelings in a non-rational process, and second, through a rational consideration of the moral fitness of fictional characters, a reading practice implied by Wollstonecraft's very assessment of Adelina. Barker-Benfield is correct in noting that Wollstonecraft's ideal is one type of 'sensibility', one 'tempered by reason', over a visceral and unconscious 'imbibing' (361). While Wollstonecraft at this point does not question whether the imitation of a character ought to be the aim of reading, she distinguishes between the modes by which readers identify with fictional characters.

Novels themselves, of course, encouraged either submersion in the text or a more autonomous reading practice, and it was the possibility of the latter which in fact prompted Wollstonecraft's criticism of *Emmeline*. Wollstonecraft, however, undervalues the potential of this text to present a less submissive image of femininity. Reading allows Emmeline a measure of self-determination. It is Emmeline's self-education in her uncle's library which makes her resistant to his wishes. Irmgard Maassen argues that the function of the novel at this time was to embody 'bourgeois subjectivity' in the heroine who resists 'aristocratic privilege'. The self-determination of the heroine with respect to marriage reflects the 'victory' of the middle classes over 'the old aristocratic value system' (175). At the same time, women writers could apply learning to feminist purposes that are not implicit in this model, as Maassen argues in the case of Wollstonecraft's own novels. Thus,

Wollstonecraft's criticism in the *Analytical Review*, and more so in *Rights of Woman*, is not simply a reiteration of a commonplace moralist demand for the inculcation of 'duties' through proper reading curriculum and practice, but a means by which women readers can acquire the rational-critical tools by which to assess texts themselves. It is also a means of exhorting writers to create more autonomous female models.

Modern critical commentary on Wollstonecraft, and on advice literature in general, tends to assume the dominance of a 'pedagogy of example', to use Bannet's term (75). This reading of Wollstonecraft's critical principles appears in an important theoretical treatment of Wollstonecraft written in the 1970s, in Cora Kaplan's *Sea Changes*. Kaplan declares that,

Wollstonecraft's implicit theory of reading assumes the reader will identify herself with the female heroine. The reading of popular fiction and the fantasy induced by it depend at one level on the identification of reader and heroine, and the subsequent acting-out of a related narrative trajectory. (60)

Certainly, the concept of imitation is a central assumption in Wollstonecraft's writing, but it is not as monolithic or unchanging as Kaplan suggests. Part of the problem is that Kaplan sees Wollstonecraft's practices as simply reflective of a broad historical phenomenon:

Late-eighteenth-century theories of reading, as they appeared in both aesthetic and political discourses, assumed a fairly direct relationship between reading and action, especially in the naïve reader, the barely literate, uneducated working-class person – and women. (122)

Wollstonecraft's concern with female readers is clear throughout the reviews, but by the time of *Rights of Woman*, 'the relationship between reading and action' was no longer assumed. Wollstonecraft's views on exemplary role models begin to shift soon after she begins her reviewing career. In a review written a year after the *Emmeline* piece, Wollstonecraft questions whether the role models who appear in novels ought always to be moral, and suggests that imitation of fictional characters should be optional rather than automatic. Commenting on a novel by Helen Maria Williams's *Julia* (1790), Wollstonecraft states:

A good tragedy or novel, if the criterion be the effect which it has on the reader, is not always the most moral work, for it is not the reveries of sentiment, but the struggles of passion – of those *human passions*, that too frequently cloud the reason, and lead *mortals* into dangerous errors, if not into absolute guilt, which raise the most lively emotions, and leave the most lasting impression on the memory. (*AnRev* 253)

There is greater intellectual detachment here than in the earlier review, seen in the concept that the ‘effect’ of fictional narratives ‘on the reader’ is one option amongst others. This comment promotes the autonomy of the reader, who should not read only to be taught, but who, given additional critical tools, can distance herself from the text. In this review, sensibility and exemplariness are seen as abstract literary concepts that are up for debate and revision.

Wollstonecraft suggests in the review of *Julia* that a novel ought to expose readers to morals in the process of formation rather than sentimentalized moral perfection. The ideal of a moral dialectic appears in Chapter 1 of *Rights of Woman*, which presents the ‘struggle of the passions’ as fundamental to human development: ‘For what purpose were the passions implanted? That man by struggling with them might attain a degree of knowledge denied to the brutes, whispers Experience’ (*VRW* 1.81). The generic male pronoun here points to the influence of more general Enlightenment philosophical discourse rather than a specific interest in literary genre. Pope’s *Essay on Man*, which can be taken as one statement of this discourse, describes ‘virtues’ such as ‘wit’, ‘honesty’, and ‘love’, growing from the ‘savage stock’ of ‘envy’ and ‘lust’: ‘The surest virtues thus from passions shoot’ (Pope 2.179-82). Wollstonecraft’s statement of the principle of moral dialectic in Chapter 1 seems a formulaic reiteration, what Virginia Sapiro has dubbed an ‘Enlightenment catechism’ (52). In fact, Wollstonecraft makes it clear that this repetition has been made necessary by an equally prevailing misconception that women are denied the fundamental means of self-development.

In the present state of society it appears necessary to go back to first principles in search of the most simple truths, and to dispute with some prevailing prejudice every inch of ground. (*VRW* 1.81)

This is not the mouthing of a 'catechism' but the self-conscious positioning of a woman critic versus writers who have lost their bearings, most of whom are men. Wollstonecraft will in this chapter assert the authoritative status drawn from the established social roles of the political 'philosopher' and literary critic. This is evident in her specific references to Rousseau's *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences* and her representation of republican screeds against monarchy, papal corruption, and standing armies (cf. 103).

As Wollstonecraft's politics come to the foreground in *Rights of Woman*, her thoughts on exemplariness have shifted as well. Barbara Taylor notes that in *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft did not encourage the emulation of great women:

When Wollstonecraft denounced heroines in 1792 it was on the grounds that praise for Great Women was no substitute for respect for women in general. What was the exceptional woman an exception to, after all, but the frustrated, degraded condition of the majority? ('Mother-Haters' 7)

Taylor's claim of Wollstonecraft's 'denunciation of heroines' is supported by such passages as the following: '[A]re not all heroes, as well as heroines, exceptions to general rules? I wish to see women neither heroines nor brutes; but reasonable creatures' (*VRW* 4.146). Taylor's insight helps to disprove the assumption that Wollstonecraft's theoretical stand concerning 'a pedagogy of example' was uniform and derivative.

In her reviews, Wollstonecraft also engages with issues of genre for the purpose of evaluating the moral effect of texts. In a 1789 review of a German biography, Wollstonecraft declares that,

Biography is universally allowed to be more useful than history, when individuals, in private stations, turn over the pages. Particular touches of nature fasten on the memory, whilst we contemplate a being like ourselves; as we advance, we gain a new insight into human nature, and see the man, in *propria persona*, in spite of the artful covering that vanity, or self-delusion, spreads over the truth. Dr. Johnson has somewhere remarked, that the life of the most insignificant fellow creature, sketched by himself, would certainly convey many instructive lessons to the reader. (*AnRev* 74-75)



Like the bluestockings, Wollstonecraft draws from literary authorities in her assertion of critical principles, in this case Samuel Johnson, but also from early Enlightenment historiography.

It is important to consider the more distant historical source in addition to the more obvious one because both the bluestockings and the women critics who followed them should be seen as equally capable of drawing from neoclassical and early Enlightenment as Johnson himself was. The idealization of exemplary biography over an 'antiquarian' approach, which stressed the accumulation of data and material evidence over narrative history, was in fact a longstanding theme. Francis Bacon, in *The Advancement of Learning* (1605) declares that in the writing of history, the most 'perfect' forms were the biography and autobiography. Bacon compares chronicles to biographies, or 'lives', which, 'if they be well written, propounding to themselves a person to represent in whom actions both greater and smaller, public and private, have a commixture, must of necessity contain a more true, native, and lively representation' (86-87).

In the writing of Wollstonecraft and her contemporaries, such models of individualist humanism are coupled with theories of associationism and other concepts concerning the effect of literary protagonists upon readers.<sup>39</sup> Samuel Johnson is credited here as the source of her views on the value of biography, but if we consider the reviews chronologically, it seems apparent that Wollstonecraft's position was strengthened by her appreciation in 1790 of Rousseau's *Confessions* (1782), an appreciation that Gary Kelly points out was widespread amongst Jacobin novelists (cf. footnote #62). At the start of his autobiography, Rousseau famously claims that even if he has not relayed the facts accurately, then the history of his emotions, 'a faithful account', is more useful and more reliable (12). Rousseau's claim is considered in Wollstonecraft's first review of *The Confessions*:

Without considering whether Rousseau was right or wrong, in thus exposing his weaknesses, and shewing himself just as he was, with all his imperfections on his head, to his frail fellow-creatures, it is only necessary to observe, that a description of what has actually passed in a human mind must ever be useful. (*AnRev* 229)

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<sup>39</sup> In Godwin's 'History and Romance', for instance, he states, 'I believe I should be better employed in thus studying one man, than in perusing the abridgement of Universal History in sixty volumes [...]' (146). This is written after *Rights of Woman*.



As we will see below, Wollstonecraft displays a self-consciousness that her approach in this review is atypical of moralist judgments of Rousseau's work. To be sure, Wollstonecraft's reviews can by no means be seen as disinterested exercises in belletristic literary categorizing, and frequently reiterate moralistic readings. However, in this case, Wollstonecraft's call to suspend automatic judgments of 'right or wrong' asks the reader to see the genre of autobiography as a genre with unique advantages, one that offers an understanding of 'a human mind' that cannot easily be obtained elsewhere.

Thus, in Wollstonecraft's reviews, literary criticism provides a direct route to social commentary, an established practice among Wollstonecraft's female predecessors. Clara Reeve's *The Progress of Romance* (1785) employs the virtual social setting as she links literary critical discourse to broader social authority. Reeve's work is important because it is a book-length discussion on genre, and as such, an enhancement of the literary authority of its author. The *Progress of Romance* is written as a dialogue between two central characters, Euphrasia and Hortensius, who meet in Euphrasia's genteel home. A third character, Sophia, occasionally intervenes to endorse Euphrasia's opinions or to reinforce civility when the exchange 'waxes warm'. Euphrasia is the literary expert who gradually instructs Hortensius in the history and definition of the 'genus' of romance by means of Socratic questioning, drawing out his assumptions and correcting them. This draws on the bluestockings' claim to classical literary knowledge, exemplified in Elizabeth Carter's celebrated work. Hortensius holds to the traditional prejudice of exalting canonized authors such as Homer and Shakespeare, without knowing exactly why. Disabusing him of his notions reconfirms the authority of the woman scholar and critic.

The representation of a domestic setting for what are essentially literary seminars links Reeve's work to the bluestockings, as does her role as instructor. It is significant that the beneficiary of her superior knowledge is a middle-aged man, who is instructed through live dialogue. Terry Castle emphasizes the importance of 'talk' for the bluestockings:

We should not forget [...] that some of the most important female criticism in the period was never written down at all. Eighteenth-century women *talked*

about literature, even when they did not always feel free to write about it. Literary salons and bluestocking clubs became increasingly popular and influential over the course of the century. (444)

While literature was talked about and thus regulated in the salons, these writers further enhanced their 'popularity and influence' through textual representations of salon conversation, which certainly reached a broader audience than the salons themselves.<sup>40</sup> Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall* (1762) provides another instance of how bluestocking sociability was promulgated through written texts. In *Millenium Hall*, a community of learned women live separately from society at large in a country estate. There they educate women and young people of various social classes. This is presented as a superior, utopian model for education that does not exist elsewhere. The fictional narrator of the text is a 'gentleman', who is accompanied by a young man whose head has been turned by pride and the mores of 'the town'. The structure of the novel rests on a narrative trajectory of his salutary reformation through the exposure to this community. The bluestocking regime of virtue and learning has mediated knowledge to this young man, a reflection of the way in which the bluestockings conceived of their social role as speakers and writers.

In *The Progress of Romance*, Reeve establishes her critical criteria and argument at the outset. Reeve promotes a re-evaluation of the Romance through a review of its history and an analysis of its relationship to other genres. The prevailing judgment, embodied in the stubborn Hortensius, is that the genre of the Romance is inferior, seen 'as proper furniture only for a lady's Library'. Reeve corrects Hortensius, and significantly, draws upon women's literary scholarship in a direct and unfavourable comparison with male commentators (xiv). Reeve compares the two genres first in terms of their historical provenance, but most importantly in terms of an overriding criterion that supersedes pedantic literary categorization:

*Euph.* [...] The Novel is a picture of real life and manners, and of the times in which it is written. The Romance in lofty and elevated language, describes what never happened nor is likely to happen. – The Novel gives a familiar relation of such things, as pass every day before our eyes, such as may

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<sup>40</sup> Habermas's account of early eighteenth-century coffee houses and their representation in Addison and Steele's periodicals provides a parallel with earlier transmutations of physical into virtual forums of discussion: 'The periodical articles were not only made the object of the discussion by the public of the coffee houses but were viewed as integral parts of this discussion' (42).

happen to our friend, or to ourselves; and the perfection of it, is to represent every scene, in so easy and natural a manner, and to make them appear so probable, as to *deceive us* into a persuasion (at least while we are reading) that all is real, until we are affected by the joys or distresses, of the persons in the story, as if they were our own. (1:111; my emphasis)

The passage above puts romances and novels on a par because they could be equally 'deceptive'; this revises literary value, making the moral and educative function of a text more crucial than its historical pedigree, and thus ideally it is the moral function that ought to determine its form. As we have seen in Wollstonecraft's comment on Helen Maria Williams, an important 'criterion' in these pieces of women's criticism 'is the effect it [the novel] has on the reader' (*AnRev* 253; cf. 66). Reeve is re-enacting an earlier neoclassical debate, and evaluating texts in terms of their moral worth. First, however, Reeve employs an authoritative rhetoric of literary history in order to do so. Reeve insists that the Romance is an offshoot of the Epic, and associates Homer and Virgil with the *Arabian Nights* and contemporary romance, on the basis of similarly improbable narratives, something which horrifies Hortensius (1:22).

Reeve's substantial and authoritative critical essay is ultimately in the service of a prevalent contemporary concern, the influence of literature upon readers, and especially upon young female readers. Thus, *The Progress of Romance* returns to the educative or 'moral' function of criticism. Reeve signals this with the comment above, concerning the identification of the reader with fictional characters. By the end of the work, it seems that the genres of romance and the novel have not been compared only for the sake of an arid, belletristic discussion, but ultimately for their social value as vehicles for education of the young. This approach is made more apparent in the structure of the work, which can be roughly divided into two parts. The first part is an extended discussion of literary categories. Here, Reeve professes a disinterested scholarly aim. In doing so, she distinguishes herself from other writers on the topic, naming 'Dr. Beattie' and his *Dissertation on Fable and Romance* (1783).<sup>41</sup> Her faint praise and sarcastic thrusts enhance her own prestige. Beattie is a 'genius' who has 'marked out the boundaries' of the 'genus' of romance, but the 'more laborious task of detail and arrangement' is left to 'inferior talents' (x-xi). This

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<sup>41</sup> Published as *Dissertations Moral and Critical*, 2 vols. Dublin: 1783.

implies the superiority of her method of close reading, and the literary expertise of fellow women scholars. She puts male writers such as John Warton on a par with writers of her 'own sex' (xiv). Warton's *History of English Poetry* (1774-81) is compared to the work of apparently more satisfying scholars such as Susannah Dobson, and her *Literary History of the Troubadour* (1779). In this same manner, Reeve mentions a predecessor, the 'ingenious' Elizabeth Rowe, who had collected extracts of romance writing in the eight-volume *History of Joseph* (1736) (xvii). Reeve also praises her contemporary, Madame Genlis, who apparently inspired Reeve's use of 'the dialogue form' with her *Theatre of Education* (1781) (ix).

The second half of *The Progress of Romance* is a review of numerous well-known books, in which Reeve passes judgment upon their appropriateness for young readers. This section is not coincident with Volume 2, but begins near the end of Volume 1. Reeve makes a general review of women's writing starting from the Restoration period. Aphra Behn is praised but her apparent licentiousness renders her works unsuitable for the young (1:117-19). Delarivier Manley is mentioned with great disapproval, and Reeve affects disgust at the mere mention of the name (1:119). Eliza Haywood is given more latitude. She had been unfortunately influenced by the Restoration manners of Behn and Manley, and wrote some 'amorous novels in her youth', but 'repented of her faults' in writing her later, moral works, including the *Female Spectator* (1:120-21). Despite Reeve's claims of intellectual disinterest at the start, *The Progress of Romance* eventually turns to the issue of how reading impacts upon female identity and behaviour. Reeve's criteria are clear in the following discussion of another two novels:

But what gives a still higher value to these two books, they are evidently written to promote the cause of religion and virtue, and may safely be put into the hands of youth. (1:123)

In this way, *The Progress of Romance* ultimately functions to regulate female reading, and Reeve's literary specialist's language is enclosed within an educative project, understood in its broad sense of socialization.

While Wollstonecraft and Reeve differed in their aims and somewhat in their critical methods, they both employed specific literary criteria in a self-conscious manner, one which was meant to establish their authority as critics, and as mediators

of literary knowledge to an audience of women as well as men. This is a different form of authorial agency than the parental figure whose authority rests on a sentimental or familial attachment to a young student, daughter, or niece (the typical scenario of the conduct book). Instead, it was through the establishment of rational intellectual personas that these women proceeded to judge a series of texts. This often came at the expense of male commentators. In *The Progress of Romance*, Hortensius is impressed and ultimately persuaded by Euphrasia's claim that she has organized her observations into a 'system' (1:140). Reeve establishes herself as a critic with rational powers above the norm, and in this case, above those of her male interlocutor. When Wollstonecraft employs a rationalist persona in *Rights of Woman*, who judges texts and canonical male authors, she employs a form of authority prefigured in the writings of the bluestockings. In the following section, we will see that the role of female mediator of literature, in the persona of anthologist, was one established even earlier.

## 1.2 Anthologizing as a Critical Strategy

A basic strategy in *Rights of Woman* is the quotation and comparison of large portions of text, especially in Chapters 2, 3, and 8. Wollstonecraft's placement of quotations in juxtaposition to one another draws the reader's attention to the inner contradictions within an individual text, as in the case of Milton and Rousseau. It also serves to demonstrate how a particular text may be egregious and regressive in comparison to the supposedly enlightened approach of other texts, as when Wollstonecraft juxtaposes the 'lascivious' sentiments of a conduct book by James Fordyce with the 'sentimental' and 'benevolent' words of John Gregory. Furthermore, quotations are handled in a number of specific ways, at times placed in footnotes, at others taking up a significant portion of the main text, and at others clipped and inserted into the flow of Wollstonecraft's rhetoric. These paratextual strategies are drawn from the practices of the contemporary periodicals and from anthologies. Wollstonecraft employs the contentious partisan tone of the former and the representation of a cumulative ideological consensus of the latter. Thus, it is important to contextualize Wollstonecraft's collecting and editing techniques in



*Rights of Woman* in terms of contemporary practices in the closely related forms of the anthology and the periodical.

Leah Price points out that anthologies are not merely evaluative mechanisms for building canons, but guides to reading practices. 'Anthologies are more than a referendum. They determine not simply who gets published or what gets read, but who reads, and how' (3). The anthology can configure a reader's attention span by presenting excerpts of a particular length. Eighteenth-century anthologies for women generally presented material in shorter bits than those for men. More importantly, these collections expurgated material according to a gendered regime of what was 'proper' to the development of socially acceptable femininity. As Price notes, these collections are 'designed to [...] regulate the pace of reading' and control readers' autonomous habits of skipping (22). The gendered nature of these regulatory practices is evident in a brief comparison. William Enfield's *Speaker* (1774), meant for the use of 'boys', contains pieces of an average length of 2 ½ pages. In the first three Books, or chapters, these are organized under headings that indicate a gradual movement from educative acquisition to practice in public speech: Narrative Pieces, Didactic Pieces, Argumentative Pieces, Orations and other Harangues, and Dialogues (v-vii). The *Female Reader*, attributed to Wollstonecraft, and patterned upon the *Speaker*, opens with a set of aphorisms of a few lines each. After that point, the average length of the quotations is approximately one page. The organization of the contents resembles that of *The Speaker*, but the *Female Reader* has been expurgated of those sections which would encourage public speech: Narrative Pieces; Didactic and Moral Pieces; Allegories and Pathetic Pieces; Dialogues, Conversations, and Fables; Descriptive Pieces; Devotional Pieces (xvi-xx). It seems that those sections which help develop *public* speaking and debate are simply cut out of the contents of *The Female Reader*.

While the anthology was distinctly gendered, the mediating function of the editor or reviewer is nevertheless a source of public authority for women:

More women also took on the literary authority entailed in editing, *anthologizing*, reviewing, and writing literary biography and literary criticism. At the same time, most women writers still experienced considerable anxiety that their literary ambitions might somehow unsex them and engaged in self-censorship that constricted or weakened their work. Some took on the task of *policing other women* to keep them within the narrowed



constraints of proper contemporary feminine domesticity. (Staves 26; my emphases)

Although Staves recognizes the authority which accrues to those who manage text in different ways, she sees the deployment of that authority primarily in terms of power struggles *between* women. Staves rehearses Mary Poovey's central claim that the ideology of feminine propriety seeped into the style of women's writing, and led some women, apparently, to impose these norms on other women. Certainly the authority which comes with editing, anthologising, and critical commentary was used to regulate both readers and fellow writers, as is obvious in Hannah More's *Strictures*, but women's intellectual interactions with each other were not restricted to the maintenance of the norms of 'propriety'. In *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft takes an authoritative role not for the purpose of enforcing the 'narrow constraints' of domesticity, but to exhort her fellow writers to resist a 'male' form of writing, as we will see in her critique of Hester Thrale Piozzi and Anna Laetitia Barbauld.

The image of the female editor as maternal mediator of literature was often used to enforce gendered reading, even when she is fabricated for the purpose, a practice beginning early in the century. *The Ladies Library* (1714) is an anthology of educative and moral readings allegedly collected 'by a Lady', according to the title page. Donald F. Bond, the modern editor of Addison and Steele's periodicals, has established the provenance of this collection, and connected it definitively to the *Spectator*. In an often-quoted passage from *Spectator* no.10, Addison invites women into the conversational space of the periodical:

It was said of Socrates, that he brought Philosophy down from heaven, to inhabit among Men; and I shall be ambitious to have it said of me, that I have brought philosophy out of Closets and Libraries, Schools and Colleges, to dwell in Clubs and Assemblies, at Tea-Tables, and in Coffee-Houses. (1:144)

As Bond points out, one month after this famous invitation to women to read and converse along with men, Addison visits the library of 'a Lady' and notes that her collection, though extensive and erudite, is lacking in guides to conduct. This experience, recounted in no. 37, prompts him to declare the need for a woman's anthology:

What improvements would a woman have made, who is so susceptible of impressions from what she reads, had she been guided to such books as have a tendency to enlighten the understanding and rectify the passions, as well as to those which are of little more use than to divert the imagination?  
(1.37:158)

The reading curriculum can be wide, but it is definitively gendered, as is Addison's view of the relatively greater 'sensibility' of women readers, a concept that is expressed here before the term itself gained wide currency. In *Spectator* no. 92, Addison again calls for a female reading curriculum, something that is 'necessary' because women apparently require material that is less intellectually challenging, 'most books being calculated for Male Readers and generally written with an Eye to Men of Learning' (1:393).<sup>42</sup> It is interesting to compare this justification for a gendered curriculum in 1711 with a much earlier statement, by a seventeenth-century woman writer:

If any desire distinctly to know what they [women] should be instructed in I answer, I cannot tell where to begin to admit Women, nor from what part of Learning to exclude them, in regard of their Capacities. The whole *Encyclopedeia* of Learning may be useful some way or other to them.  
(Makin 24)

Bathsua Makin proposes this in 1673 as a part of her proposal for a girls' school. And her suggested areas of study are 'Art, Science, Rhetorick, Grammar, Logic, Astronomy, Geography, History, Medicine, and Languages, especially Greek and Hebrew' (ibid.).

Addison again insists on the need for a woman's anthology in *Spectator* no. 140, in which we read a letter from 'Parthenia', who begs his advice on the proper means of 'improvement' (2.140:54-55). Bond explains that Steele's *Ladies Library* was probably a response to this situation (*Spectator* 1:n.159) and states that that the *Ladies Library* published in the same year, 1714, is not 'written by a lady', but is Steele's own compilation of religious writings and conduct manuals. The preface to

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<sup>42</sup> Addison opens with the complaint that one cannot trust booksellers for advice on a women's reading curriculum because they 'have an eye to their own advantage more than to that of the ladies' (1:389). If this is true in 1711, then it should be true of Joseph Johnson, who seems to have stocked *The Female Reader* with entries that are much more conservative than Wollstonecraft's thoughts on women even in 1789 (cf. Appendix A).

this work is most likely written by Steele himself. Clifford Siskin has noted that fictionalized authorship was also typical of periodical practices, including Addison's work in the *Spectator*, noting that a 'fictive' authorial role 'closed the communicative distance of print' (165-6). In the case of the *Ladies Library*, the use of a fictional female editor helps in the sale of the text, but also reinforces the gender of this genre. Apparently, a female persona is necessary in order to instruct the female reader on what and how to read.

The choice of topics in this anthology is similar to that of conduct books, from which much of the material is taken. There are lessons on religion, reading habits, and proper behaviour organized by domestic and other private roles. In fact, the majority of the selections are taken from earlier advice literature as well as from sermons. Bond has identified many of the texts in the collection, which are unsigned, including: Tillotson, Fénelon, Scott's *Christian Life*, and significantly, three titles from the Lady's existing collection, one that Addison had initially disapproved of: Taylor's *Holy Living*, Halifax's *Advice to a Daughter*, and *The Ladies Calling* (1:159.n). The general tone is fairly repressive. Under the topic of 'Wit and Delicacy', young women are warned against poetry for its tendency to take control of the senses (1:25). This prefigures the concern over sensibility and the novel. As for conversation, the following advice is given:

A young Lady should never speak, but for Necessity, and even then with Diffidence and Deference: She should never talk of things above the common reach of her Age and Sex, however she may be inform'd of them by the Advantages of her Quality and Education. (*Ladies Library* I.56)

This is typical of many of the principles expounded in this collection, making it apparent that the intention is for women's reading and conversation to be regulated in accordance with gender norms. In light of Addison and Steele's interest in a separate and gendered reading curriculum, it appears that women are not meant to abandon their tea tables completely.

The connections between the anthology and the periodical have significant repercussions for women writers. Barbara Benedict explains that periodicals had begun in the earlier half of the century essentially as miscellanies or digests of any number of printed materials.

Topical, inclusive, shapeless, and collaborative, the periodical jumbles together snippets of different genres written by different people – from journalistic essays to poetry – and rushes them into print. Fact, fiction, literature, and gossip intermingle as authors, editors, and contributors from the readership together conjure an atmosphere of intimate, sophisticated, fashionable conversation. ('Readers' 10)

Benedict then documents a shift in the form of the periodical as miscellany to an organ of more specialized and explicit criticism, marked by the founding of Ralph Griffiths's *Monthly Review* in 1749, and followed by the *Gentleman's Magazine*, which in 1731 had begun as a digest of other periodicals (11). These changes were the result of shifting marketing strategies. In the earlier period, readers were told they were buying 'more for the price', part of the motto of the *Gentleman's*, in essence purchasing written matter in bulk.<sup>43</sup> In the later period, literary commentary was meant to increase readers' interest in individual editions published by the same editor of a particular periodical or by those of another member of a 'conger' (6).

Individual periodicals were recognized mediums for particular political interests. The collection of texts within them functioned very much as anthologies, reflecting ideologies and regulating reading habits.<sup>44</sup> The roles of the editor of an anthology and the lead figure in a periodical were both powerful, and indeed sometimes interchangeable. These roles were appropriated by literary women throughout this period. Charlotte Lennox appears in the role of the authoritative female editor of the *Lady's Museum* (1760-61), a periodical which ran only two years. This is in essence a collection of mostly fictional narratives, many of which have plot lines similar to that of Lennox's *Female Quixote*. In the very brief preface to the *Lady's Museum*, Lennox claims that her first tale is written by a young 'Lady' who could be persuaded to write more if the public enjoys her work, despite a 'diffidence' that is

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<sup>43</sup> The stated project of this magazine, according to Reitan, was to draw from as many sources as possible (13-14). An admiring 'reader' praises the editors for their wide choice of materials, and does so in verse, in which he employs another metaphor for a miscellaneous offering: 'Urban thy book's a public feast, / Each reader an invited guest. / As such, the bill of fare shou'd be / Replete with vast variety' (qtd. in Kizer 22-23). This is signed by the apparently sincere and objective 'Frank Neitherside' (*Gentleman's Magazine* 5:329). 'Sylvanus Urban' was the pseudonym for the editor and main correspondent.

<sup>44</sup> The *Gentleman's Magazine's* first logo was a bouquet of flowers, a symbol of anthology, as the root term is from the Greek for 'flower'. By the end of the century, the newly founded *Monthly Magazine or British Register* (1796) also refers to itself as a 'miscellany'.

only 'natural' (1). Whether or not this writer actually existed, this tale, *The Trifler*, is strikingly similar to *The Female Quixote*. In *The Trifler*, a young woman's reading makes her prideful, which vexes her mother. This young woman then learns from her brother how to redirect all her intelligence and erudition to fulfilling her 'duties' (8). She is eternally grateful and falls in line. The second excerpt, 'The Studies proper for Women', translated from French, advises that women learn to read in order to please their intelligent husbands, but not so much as to threaten a womanly 'elegance of form', which might be the case, for example, if they read theology (11). The third selection is another fictionalised moral tale whose conclusion asserts that 'the highest intellectual improvements were not incompatible with the humbler cares of a domestic life' (19). These extracts reinforce Lennox's project of regulating female reading, as we have seen in the discussion of *The Female Quixote*.

Another miscellany/periodical of this type is Eliza Haywood's *Female Spectator*, which appeared in four issues in 1744-46. Its aim of reforming women rather than titillating them reflects the reformation of Haywood herself, who was known as the author of a series of scandalous novels. Clara Reeve, in *The Progress of Romance*, later states that Haywood's mature work is commendable precisely because it functions to instil morals rather than to provoke extreme emotional and physical reactions in the young reader: 'May her first writings be forgotten, and the last survive to do her honour' (1:122). Thus, the account of Haywood's life reflects the moral trajectory of the moralizing narrative. In the *Female Spectator*, Haywood prefigures the bluestockings by employing the image of a female social group as a means of invoking consensus and authority. Haywood claims that there is an actual group which meets at her home (1:2-6), and the frontispiece to the *Female Spectator* visualizes this group (see the frontispiece to this thesis). However, upon closer examination, it is primarily a collection of short novels most likely written by Haywood. Although the *Female Spectator* also includes passages from contemporary advice literature, most of the selections are vignettes featuring characters with classicised pseudonyms very much like those in Haywood's novels. The majority of these books aim to instruct the reader in good morals, and so the claim must stand as evidence that the invocation of a salon, or conversational forum, itself imparts authority to 'the undertaking' (1:6). Haywood defines this undertaking quite explicitly at the start:



Reading is universally allowed to be one of the most improving, as well as agreeable amusements; but then to render it so, one should, among the number of Books which are perpetually issuing from the press, endeavour to single out such as promise to be most conducive to those ends. (*Female Spectator* 1:1)

Haywood had evolved from a writer of post-Restoration romantic intrigues to a moralist concerned with judging the propriety of new books, a fact which prompts Reeve's approval. A brief mention should also be made of Frances Brooke's *Old Maid*, which ran to 36 numbers from 1755-56. As Betty A. Schellenberg points out, this publication had a longer print run than the other two and provided many opportunities for political statements (59-60). Unlike publications by Lennox and Haywood, *Old Maid* features lengthy discussions by the female editor in first person. Brooke's persona is autonomous and authoritative. There are calls for greater religious toleration and the establishment of a national institute for criticism (Schellenberg 59).

Towards the end of the century, the persona of the woman editor becomes increasingly prominent. This is the case for *Thoughts of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Citizen of Geneva, Selected from his Writings by an Anonymous Editor and translated by Miss Henrietta Colebrook* (1788), which appeared in the same year in which Wollstonecraft begins writing literary reviews. It is a collection of excerpts from Rousseau's works meant for the female reader, and belongs to the subgenre of the eighteenth-century anthology referred to as 'Beauties'. A pirated edition of this collection is titled *The Beauties of Rousseau; selected by a lady* (1788). Wollstonecraft reviews both of these collections briefly, noting that the latter collection is somewhat jumbled (*AnRev* 49). It was not only the subject matter or literary genre that determined whether an anthology was meant for a female audience. Expurgation itself was an advertised attraction, promising that a collection had been made suitable for young women readers. Benedict argues that the female audience for the subgenre of 'Beauties' is 'conjured' through the careful culling of excerpts. She cites Samuel Johnson's dictionary on 'beauty': 'Any thing more eminently excellent than the rest of that with which it is united'. Thus the name of the genre itself, used in its exclusionary sense, promises a practice of expurgation. As Benedict paraphrases this idea, these 'are passages which can be severed from their

surrounding context without losing their charm for the reader' ('Beauties' 318). Under cover of what is most 'excellent', the selection and editing process bypasses the critical consciousness of the female reader.

The female editor of *The Beauties of Rousseau* remains in the background. Colebrook only addresses the reader once, in the introduction, most briefly and modestly. She demonstrates a concern with sensibility, and a justification for protecting women readers from dangerous text:

[Rousseau] speaks from the heart to the heart: he communicates to his readers, as by an irresistible contagion, that enthusiastic love of nature and virtue which glowed in his own breast.

It must be confessed, at the same time, that there are eccentricities and errors in the writings of this exalted genius, equally repugnant to the Christian faith and to sound sense: and well-disposed minds might, perhaps, doubt whether an indiscriminate perusal of all that he has written, might not be followed by dangerous consequences. (*Beauties of Rousseau* v-viii)

For Colebrook, Rousseau is important as a moral teacher, but his method of communicating his ideas is double-edged. His 'love of virtue' allegedly leaps across the page to the reader precisely because he himself feels it so strongly. By the same token, his 'errors' could just as easily infect the reader as his 'virtues'. These are commonplace concerns about the power of texts to affect the overly 'sensible' female reader. As a responsible editor, Colebrook counteracts the 'dangerous consequences' of reading Rousseau by expurgation, or, as the title states, by the 'selection' of acceptable passages.

While Wollstonecraft's position on the issue of exposure to literature shifts between 1788 and 1792, her early review shows that she is in agreement with Colebrook concerning the dangers of reading Rousseau. In fact, in reviewing *The Beauties of Rousseau* themselves, she states that Colebrook is not cautious enough:

We cannot coincide with the translator, that the *selected* thoughts of Rousseau are calculated to improve young people, as it certainly requires a mind previously enlightened by experience, to enter into the reasoning of an author so thoroughly acquainted with the human heart. (*AnRev* [1788] 49)

Wollstonecraft maintains that a collection must be sifted for moral value and ought to be well ordered. Dr Burney's *General History of Music* (1790), a survey covering the ancients to the moderns, is 'well digested' (210). On the other hand, one of her complaints about Hester Piozzi's travelogue is its 'desultory' organization, characterized as 'lax freedom' (109). Another collection of sermons for children is dismissed because it includes faddish literary trivia that 'should never meet the eye of a child' (124). Finally, Wollstonecraft harshly criticizes an anthology of advice literature, *On Woman* (1790) because it is, again, 'desultory'. Moreover, because of the random inclusion of any number of unattributed texts, this 'heterogeneous mass [...] will tend, in common with novels, to render women more weak and affected' (*AnRev* 291). The concern with a range of genres prefigures Wollstonecraft's wide sweep in *Rights of Woman*, in which epic poetry, educational treatises, and conduct literature join novels in inculcating oppressive feminine identity in women.

In one sense, Wollstonecraft's criticism of *On Woman* is traditional. It reinforces the expectation that anthologies are to be thematic, if not homogeneous. As Barbara Benedict notes, the eighteenth-century anthology is meant to give an illusion of 'consensus' amongst its featured authors ('Anthology' 236-37). While she expects collections to be homogenous and 'well digested', Wollstonecraft's own practices increasingly enact confrontational readings of received texts rather than passive learning. Mary Waters states that the 'arrangement' of quotations in Wollstonecraft's reviews is designed to 'make a specific and provocative point' (421), taking as an instance Wollstonecraft's review of a travelogue by William Gilpin (*AnRev* 196-98). Wollstonecraft, as Waters rightly points out, used the editorial practice of extensive quotation as a way of making her argument. Her lengthy review of Catharine Macaulay's *Letters on Education* (*AnRev* 309-22) parallels the organization of the target text, but the length and deployment of the quotations reflect Wollstonecraft's quarrel with some of Macaulay's positions on religion and pedagogy. Generally, when in agreement with an author, Wollstonecraft quotes more extensively and with less commentary, while briefer quotations usually signal a disagreement. I will examine this procedure and Wollstonecraft's significant review of Macaulay in greater detail in Chapter 2.

### 1.3 The Uses of Literary Criticism

Mitzi Myers observes that Wollstonecraft's moralistic readings in the *Analytical Review* are ultimately part of her politics:

Her originality is neatly enlisting standard objections to serve the larger purposes of her revisionist social ideology; she makes routine moral cavils shoulder reformist, even radical, values. ('Reviews' 88)

Wollstonecraft's criticism in the *Analytical Review* is indeed more than a collection of moral 'cavils'. In 1789, Wollstonecraft reviewed a work by Jacques Necker, *On the Importance of Religious Opinions* (1788), which she had translated. Wollstonecraft combines a discussion of morality with comments on religion, politics, and literary style.<sup>45</sup> Necker, Madame de Staël's father, was a Swiss protestant who had been director of finances for Louis XVI from 1776 to 1781, and again in 1788. Necker's opening argument is closely related to Rousseau's *Social Contract*, inasmuch as he sees religion as instrumental to the stability of the state. Wollstonecraft approves of this approach in Necker's work:

The first chapter is on the connexion of religious principles with public order; in which he ably proves that the wisest laws would not be sufficient to restrain men within the bounds of morality without those powerful motives, which religion offers to interest the affections, and enlighten the understanding. (*AnRev* 60)

After a lengthy review of the work, six pages of quotations follow. Wollstonecraft concludes with comments on its literary qualities, citing the 'energy' of Necker's 'sentiments', but also his unfortunate lapses into excessively decorative language: 'too frequently far fetched phrases obscured the simple dictates of good sense, and weakened their force' (*AnRev* 65). Wollstonecraft is also concerned, typically, with organization: 'Indeed, want of arrangement is conspicuous throughout, and it seems to arise from a number of ideas crowding into the author's mind impetuously [...]' (*AnRev* 65). Wollstonecraft applies her associationist critique, shifting from the typical focus upon the vulnerable reader to the thought processes of the author. In

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<sup>45</sup> The practice of reviewing the same work that a reviewer has translated is not uncommon. As we will see in Chapter 3, William Kenrick does the same with Rousseau's *Emile*.

*Rights of Woman*, what appear to be ad hominem attacks on Rousseau and John Gregory are extensions of the critical practice evident in reviews such as this.

A comparison with Anna Laetitia Barbauld will demonstrate that the combination of politics and literary commentary was not always as explicit in the writings of other women critics as it was in that of Mary Wollstonecraft. Barbauld, a Dissenter and sometime associate of the bluestockings, first became well known for her religious hymns for children, cited approvingly by Wollstonecraft in an early review (*AnRev* 35). At the beginning and toward the end of her career, Barbauld wrote poems that engaged with contemporary international politics, such as *Corsica* (1773), published with her first collection of poems, and *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* (1811). Barbauld also authored a series of political and theological tracts, edited the mid-century verse-treatise by Mark Akenside, *The Pleasures of the Imagination* (1744), as well as the fifty-volume *British Novelists* (1810).

In an overview of Barbauld's work, social and political issues are generally kept separate from literary commentary. In the introductory essay to *The British Novelists*, Barbauld notes that novels have been implicated in politics, and that this practice, a form of 'warfare' is 'perfectly allowable' (185). At the same time, she affects an objective stance, mentioning in this passage two novels written from opposing political perspectives, and at opposite ends of a decade of print warfare, one being Holcroft's *Anna St. Ives* (1792) and the other, Elizabeth Hamilton's *Memoirs of The Modern Philosophers* (1800). The first is a fictionalized and approving account of Godwin and Wollstonecraft, while the latter is the parody of the Godwin circle. Barbauld only briefly mentions the politicization of novels in this essay, which is otherwise concerned with issues such as literary sensibility. Barbauld's commentary on *Tristram Shandy* describes 'electric touches which thrill the nerves of the reader who possesses a correspondent sensibility of frame' (178). It is also notable that her description of literary-political 'warfare' is represented as something now passing, the 'ferment of late years' (185). At the same time, as Terry Castle points out, Barbauld joins Clara Reeve in the advocacy of women writers (Castle 452); twelve of the fifty writers in the collection are women.

Barbauld's most contentious political tract is perhaps *An Address to the Opposers of the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts* (1790), published by Joseph Johnson.



This does not bear her name and is signed 'by a Dissenter'. The language is by no means limited by norms of feminine propriety:

It is time, so near the end of the eighteenth century, it is surely time to speak with precision, and to call things by their proper names. What you call toleration, we call the exercise of a natural and unalienable right. We do not conceive it to be toleration, first to strip a man of all his dearest rights, and then to give him back a part; or even if it were the whole. (*Opposers* 10)

Barbauld refers here to Burke's speeches in House in opposition to the repeal, in which he attacked the more radical writings of Dissenters such as Robert Robinson and Joseph Priestley.<sup>46</sup> Barbauld's vigorous rhetoric is similar to that found in Wollstonecraft's first political tract published at the same time, also in defence of the Dissenters, if indirectly. Unlike Wollstonecraft, however, Barbauld does not employ a literary critical perspective to make her arguments.

*A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) prefigures the second *Vindication* in the sense that it synthesizes Wollstonecraft's literary critical practice, as seen in the reviews, with an identified political agenda. It is useful to briefly consider it in the context of women's writing such as that of the bluestockings and of Barbauld. *Rights of Men* is one of the first responses to Edmund Burke's *Reflections*, in which he takes a public stand against supporters of the French Revolution, and singles out Richard Price, and those like him, as a danger to the state. Their agitation for the abolishment of the Test Acts had by 1790 expanded to a full reform agenda, including changes in parliamentary representation and limitations on the monarchy. H.T. Dickinson documents that communities of Dissenters, especially in Birmingham, Manchester, and London, were among the proliferating clubs and societies advocating political reform (*Radicalism* 4). Burke's substantive argument rests on the principles of precedence and inheritance that are embodied in the metaphor of an entailed estate being handed down to successive generations. While Price used the occasion of the centennial of the settlement of 1689 to demand new reforms, Burke attempts to wrest away the rhetorical use of political history. Although he concedes the necessity of

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<sup>46</sup> *Parliamentary Register*, 2 March 1790. Robert Robinson (1735-90) was a Baptist preacher who began to write increasingly radical tracts in the 1780s, and associated himself with the Dissenters connected to Price and Priestley. He was one of Mary Hays's early mentors.

reforms of the state, he sees the process as incremental and orderly, and rejects any extravagant measures.

Burke does not simply rely on a form of rational argumentation to make his point, but employs a rhetoric calculated to provoke an emotional response. In his famous depiction of the near-rape of Marie Antoinette, Burke involves the reader in the literary mechanism of identifying with a heroine in distress. As Claudia Johnson points out, Burke wants the British state to appear as desirable and vulnerable as a heroine, and asks that '1000 swords' leap out in its (her) defence, employing the iconography of the sexually aroused hero of romance (34). Wollstonecraft's response to Burke works on different levels. Like Barbauld's work, *Rights of Men* contains heated Dissenting rhetoric. Although Wollstonecraft was not a Dissenter, never having formally left the Anglican faith, her connections to Price and the Dissenting community at Newington Green have been well established, most clearly in Barker-Benfield's article, 'Mary Wollstonecraft, Commonwealthwoman'. *Rights of Men* was published just a month after Burke's *Reflections*. The speed in which this text was written suggests that Joseph Johnson was eager to publish the Dissenting/reformist counterthrust, which simultaneously fulfilled his function as de facto publisher for his fellow Dissenters, and created and then exploited a market for the partisan feuding which ensued. The sales of Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Men*, and later of Paine's work by the same name, published by Dodsley, bore out Johnson's commercial strategy.

*Rights of Men* integrates literary and political discourse; Wollstonecraft makes the partisan Dissenting argument which is expected of Johnson's circle, but also engages with Burke on the level of his own literary allusions. She begins with a sally which Barker-Benfield has claimed came directly from the discourse of the self-described commonwealthmen, in which they associated their opponents with courtly effeminacy:

Sacred, however, would the infirmities and errors of a good man be, in my eyes, if they were only displayed in a private circle; if the venial fault only rendered the wit anxious, like a celebrated beauty, to raise admiration on every occasion. [...] Even the Ladies, Sir, may repeat your sprightly sallies, and retail in theatrical attitudes many of your sentimental exclamations. (VRM 8)

Barker-Benfield comments that Wollstonecraft employs the same gendered regime as might be found in Burgh's *Political Disquisitions* (1774). According to Barker-Benfield, Wollstonecraft describes Burke 'as a coquette', while she identifies herself with the ideals of 'sincerity', 'virtue', and 'rights', all central terms in the discourse of the men she is defending ('Commonwealthwoman' 105-08).

Barker-Benfield makes the important connection between Wollstonecraft's previous literary criticism in the reviews, which he sees as primarily concerned with sensibility, and her attack upon Burke: '[S]he first approached Burke as a "literary" figure and took him on as a aesthetic theoretician whose sensibility could not be detached from his party politics' (107). Barker-Benfield then gives a brief summary of Wollstonecraft's critique of novels of sensibility and the romance novel (108-09). However, it is precisely because Wollstonecraft's argument in *Rights of Men* is an explicit politicization of her reviewing practice that her approach here has to be distinguished from the republican rhetoric of Burgh, Price, and others such as Priestley. The characterization of Burke as a 'beauty', and in particular as a fond, vulnerable reader, is drawn directly from the cast of characters in sensiblist novels, rather than from the image of the courtier:

Memory, however, treasures up these proofs of native goodness; and the being who is not spurred on to any virtuous act, still thinks itself of consequence, and boasts of its feelings. Why? Because the sight of distress, or an affecting narrative, made its blood flow with more velocity, and the heart, literally speaking, beat with sympathetic emotion. (*VRM* 54)

This is the prideful Arabella of *The Female Quixote*, or the young female reader in need of correction who appears in moralist narratives in any number of literary genres. Wollstonecraft's avoidance of the male pronoun helps to strengthen the suggestion that Burke is to be equated with a fictional heroine, and with the impressionable female readers of novels. Many other passages in *Rights of Men* reflect the language and the critiques of the reviews:

When we read a book that supports our favourite opinions, how eagerly do we suck in the doctrines, and suffer our minds placidly to reflect the images that illustrate the tenets we have previously embraced. We indolently acquiesce in the conclusion [...]. A lively imagination is ever in danger of

being betrayed into error by favourite opinions, which it almost personifies, the more effectively to intoxicate the understanding. (VRM 90)

Wollstonecraft's views on the imitation of literary characters have a clear political application here. Just as the female reader ought not to imbibe the sentiments of a fainting heroine without the intervention of a critical sense, so the reader of *Reflections* ought to exercise a similar rational restraint. This is something that Burke himself has not done.

Wollstonecraft does not stop at simple analogies between Burke and hypersensitive women. For Wollstonecraft, Burke is not, ultimately, a headstrong heroine, nor an impressionable young reader, subject to moral amendment, but a powerful politician and literary figure. His affectations of sensibility are intentional and calculated, being drawn from his own thoughts on literature, as found in his treatise on aesthetics, *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757). Here, Burke theorizes the existence of essential qualities in all objects of sensation, dividing them into two broad categories, the beautiful and the sublime. These categories are described in starkly gendered terms. The beautiful equates to the feminine, that which is small, light in color and weight, smooth, weak, and vulnerable. For these reasons the beautiful provokes emotional reactions; it is endearing and asks to be protected. The sublime is equated with the masculine. It is vast if not infinite, dark, rough-edged, and strong. It provokes feelings of terror and awe.

Indeed, Wollstonecraft demonstrates a willingness to engage with this more formidable Edmund Burke. Indeed, Wollstonecraft's refers to Burke's aesthetic theory right at the start, and *Rights of Men* opens with an allusion to Burke's *Enquiry*:<sup>47</sup> '[T]ruth, in morals, has ever appeared to me the essence of the sublime; and, in taste, simplicity the only criterion of the beautiful' (VRM 7). In Claudia Johnson's view, Wollstonecraft's approach is to insist that her own political language is the more virile of the two (26-27). Mary Poovey, in discussing the language of *Rights of Men*, claims that the only way for a woman writer to enter into the public forum with a political argument is to adopt 'male discourse', and essentially *become*

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<sup>47</sup> Barker-Benfield suggests that Wollstonecraft had perhaps entitled her response to Burke after his own first work, *A Vindication of Natural Society* (1756) ('Commonwealthwoman' 104).

a man (57). But these interpretations gloss over the importance of Wollstonecraft's earlier work as a source not only of an analytical apparatus, but also of an authoritative public persona. Wollstonecraft's stance, as judge of Burke's unfitness, is one that is clearly drawn from the practices of literary criticism, which, as we have seen, are profoundly influenced by women writers who have appropriated earlier traditions. While it is clear that Wollstonecraft employs a language of republican virility against Burke's sentimental prose, she also engages directly with the aesthetic theory which underpins that prose, an approach which could more readily be found amongst bluestockings such as Reeve than amongst writers such as Burgh or Price.

Beyond the connections to practices of literary commentary, Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Men* and Barbauld's political treatises, while not explicitly about women or women's rights, contain explicit feminist arguments. *Rights of Men* contains rhetoric which idealizes manly 'virtue' and 'liberty', but also includes the following:

If beautiful weakness be interwoven in a woman's frame, if the chief business of her life be (as you insinuate) to inspire love, and nature has made an eternal distinction between the qualities that dignify a rational being and this animal perfection, her duty and happiness in this life must clash with any preparation for a more exalted state. (*VRM* 46)

Likewise, in *Address to the Opposers*, Barbauld ends with a prayer that includes the following: 'May the abolition of domestic tyranny introduce the modest train of household virtues, and purer incense be burned upon the hallowed altar of conjugal fidelity' (38-39). Although this seems conventional in its idealization of the chaste and virtuous wife, the burden of reform is not on women alone, as it would be in a Rousseauvian model. The analogy of domestic with political 'tyranny' is not a frequent feature of male writing, even amongst radicalised male Dissenters.

#### **1.4 The Persona of the Literary Critic**

Another crucial aspect of Wollstonecraft's earlier writing is a conception of the literary critic's persona, evident in a review of Part 2 of Rousseau's *Confessions*. *The Confessions* begin with a declaration that Rousseau will reveal himself in all his



flaws, claiming to present the private man to the public eye. Rather than a strictly factual account, however, it is the 'story of his feelings' (9), a 'faithful account' (12), but one which apparently was being criticized for its immorality. In a review in 1790, Wollstonecraft finds Rousseau's sincerity valuable. As we have seen in her comments on Helen Maria Williams, at this point Wollstonecraft advocates a greater exposure to morally questionable texts than earlier. She is conscious that in doing so, she departs from the commonplace moralizing of fellow reviewers, who 'hide' behind the 'phalanx' of the first person plural to deliver their routine moral judgments.

[W]ithout screening himself behind the pronoun WE, the reviewer's *phalanx*, the writer of this article will venture to say, that he should never expect to see that man do a generous action, who could ridicule Rousseau's interesting account of his feelings and reveries – who could, in all the pride of wisdom, falsely so called, despise such a heart when naked before him. (*AnRev* 228)

We have seen something similar to this self-assertion in Reeve's work, in which the female scholar pits her fresh literary perspective against the stodgy 'prejudice' of established authorities. In Wollstonecraft's review, she likewise sets aside convention in order to seek out another basis of literary value.

Caroline Franklin argues that Wollstonecraft used the first person plural as a sign of authority (71). However, Wollstonecraft's use of the *male* pronoun here suggests that her claim to authority conforms to cultural assumptions of the gender of a literary reviewer. A question of attribution could be raised here, but is very likely that this review is authored by Wollstonecraft, given that another review attributed to Wollstonecraft displays a similar perspective. In December 1791, the same month in which she completed *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft again reaffirms that Rousseau's *Confessions* are valuable, if improper for young readers (*AnRev* 409). Furthermore, the notion of contrasting her own opinion with '*prevailing opinion*', a term from a chapter title in *Rights of Woman*, is characteristic of Wollstonecraft's writing. Wollstonecraft is not simply employing the plural pronoun in the routine assumption of critical authority, but *discussing* the assumption of this kind of agency that is exercised in the role and authority of the literary critic.

Further evidence of Wollstonecraft's awareness of her role in literary culture is a letter to Joseph Johnson. Here, she describes the competition they face.

The Critical appears to me to be a timid, mean production, and its success is a reflection on the taste and judgement of the public; but, as a body, who ever gave it credit for much? The voice of the people is only truth, when some man of abilities has had time to get fast hold of the GREAT NOSE of the monster. Of course, local fame is generally a clamour, and dies away. The Appendix to the Monthly afforded me more amusement, though every article almost wants energy and a *cant* of virtue and liberality is strewed over it; as always tame, and eager to pay court to established fame. (*Letters* 179-80)<sup>48</sup>

This assessment of major contemporary periodicals is not only a biographical note on Wollstonecraft's development as a critic. When she critiques *Emile* she is also implicitly criticizing the periodicals which sponsored this text at mid-century, especially the *Monthly Review*, which essentially provided readers with the English translation in instalments. As we will see in Chapter 3 of this thesis, not only do the practices of periodical reviewing inform *Rights of Woman*, but Wollstonecraft also turns and implicitly critiques periodicals themselves.

Wollstonecraft demonstrates awareness of the role of the literary critic, and, following the practice and perceptions of the late eighteenth century, considers a number of discourses fully within the purview of 'literature'. As we have seen, she can discuss a work by Necker in terms of its theological stance, its political implications, its educative value for readers, and its literary aspects, such as genre, agency, and prose style. This procedure reappears throughout Wollstonecraft's literary reviews before 1792. As we consider the connections between her reviews for the *Analytical Review* and the literary critical dimension of *Rights of Woman*, a number of materials recur in almost unaltered form.

The critique of Hester Thrale Piozzi, praise for Thomas Day's educational-political tale *Sandford and Merton*, the lengthy treatment of Catharine Macaulay's *Letters on Education*, and repeated mentions of John Gregory and Rousseau are several concrete links between the *Analytical Review* and *Rights of Woman*. Wollstonecraft's review of Hester Thrale Piozzi's *Observations and Reflections, made in the Course of a Journey through France, Italy, and Germany* (1789) offers a

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<sup>48</sup> The *Monthly Review* was founded in 1749, and the *Critical Review* in 1756.

frequent complaint of female writers: that female writer, whether author, editor, or correspondent, is an all too transparent medium. Samuel Johnson seems ever-present in Piozzi's prose: 'The shade of Dr Johnson frequently flitted before us, when we perceived a reflection of his narrow superstitious notions distorted by a new medium' (*AnRev* 110). Mitzi Myers observes, 'Wollstonecraft criticizes her subjects for [...] serving as passive channels through which linguistic and cultural codes flow without resistance' ('Reviews' 85). In *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft's criticism of Piozzi as a mere conduit reappears in almost identical form. She states that Piozzi 'repeated by rote' and imitates 'Johnsonian periods' (5.171). Her inclusion of quotations in *Rights of Woman* from Piozzi's collection, *Letters to and from the Late Samuel Johnson* (1788), demonstrates a technique identical to the original review of 1789 in the *Analytical Review*.

In 1789, Wollstonecraft reviews Thomas Day's *Sandford and Merton*. She sees this as allowing women a more liberal education than works of the same genre:

Mr. Day, above prevailing prejudices, recommends a very different mode of education for females, from that which some late writers on the subject, have adopted; perfectly coinciding with him in opinion, we are tempted to give an extract, which will enable our reader to judge of his style, at the same time, they will perceive, that the wishes to see women educated like rational creatures, and not made mere polished playthings, to amuse the leisure hours of men. (*AnRev* 175-76)

Here Wollstonecraft finds Day superior to Madame Genlis, who apparently recommends a more sheltered upbringing for young women (*AnRev* 175-76). The same 'extract' which follows in the *Analytical Review* is used in *Rights of Woman*, where it is presented again as a contrast with another writer, Rousseau being the opponent. I examine this strategy at length in Chapter 3.

In *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft makes the unlikely connection between John Gregory, the respected writer of *A Legacy to his Daughters*, and Rousseau, who was by then an embattled figure, even amongst Wollstonecraft's radical associates. In the *Analytical Review*, these writers are held separate. Gregory is mentioned at least three times in either positive or neutral comments. In a review of an educational treatise in epistolary form, Wollstonecraft cites Gregory, along with Chapone and Fordyce, as 'important' and 'elegant' (*AnRev* 207). The two men in this group,

especially Fordyce, will be harshly criticized in *Rights of Woman*. Gregory is mentioned again that year in a list of authors who appear in an educational anthology, and once more in late 1791 without extraordinary comment (*AnRev* 398).

Rousseau is discussed frequently in the pre-1792 period. As we have seen, Wollstonecraft approves of the sincerity of his autobiographical work while confirming its lack of 'morality'. The critique in *Rights of Woman* is more extensive and harsher, but she continues to insist that Rousseau's own intentions may have been well-meaning. Rousseau is dangerous for women but he is himself debilitated by his 'exquisite senses' (*VRW* 3.109). He is weakened by his vanity, a 'desire of singularity', and a 'love of paradox' (*VRW* 3.111). Later she says that his mistaken notions are not completely his fault but due to his French upbringing (*VRW* 5.151), and 'all his errors in reasoning arose from sensibility' (*VRW* 5.160). These concessions do not weaken Wollstonecraft's attack on Rousseau's educational model, but carry over from the *Analytical Review* the distinction she has already drawn between the morals of the individual writer and the possible educative value of his work. In the review of *The Confessions*, also discussed above, Wollstonecraft writes:

Without considering whether Rousseau was right or wrong, in thus exposing his weaknesses, and shewing himself just as he was, [...] a description of what has actually passed in a human mind must ever be useful. (*AnRev* 229)

Here, as in *Rights of Woman*, there is a distinction between text and author.

As some earlier materials recur in *Rights of Woman*, they are reconfigured to make a political case, just as Wollstonecraft's reviewing practice informs *Rights of Men*. This is not only due to the maturation of Wollstonecraft's political thought following the French Revolution, but to the greater potential in the genre and format of a longer work, one which offers opportunities for politicised criticism that are not available in the shorter form of the literary review. In *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft is able to return to individual authors repeatedly, and contrast authors with each in different configurations. For example, the approval of Macaulay in Chapter 5 of *Rights of Woman* (5.175) reflects an earlier review of her *Letters on Education*, but now Macaulay appears in comparison to other women writers. Wollstonecraft does not reverse her previous opinion that Rousseau is a sincere man,

but his self-criticism is turned against him to invalidate the educational philosophy of *Emile*. Gregory reappears, but no longer as an icon of paternal benevolence, and his fame is no longer a recommendation but the occasion for a discussion of the 'dangers' of an entire range of advice literature. Wollstonecraft mines her previous critical work to support her feminist argument, and the concrete connections between the *Analytical Review* and *Rights of Woman* indicate that Wollstonecraft saw the presence of literary criticism in a political work as completely appropriate.



## Chapter 2

### Wollstonecraft's Critique of Milton in *Rights of Woman*: Rational Theology to Politicised Literary Criticism

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#### 1.0 Introduction

At the beginning of *Rights of Woman* there is an 'advertisement' which Wollstonecraft seems to have written after completing the draft:

When I began to write this work, I divided it into three parts, supposing that one volume would contain a full discussion of the arguments which seemed to me to rise naturally from a few simple principles; but fresh illustrations occurring as I advanced, I now present only the first part to the public. Many subjects, however, which I have cursorily alluded to, call for particular investigation, especially the laws relative to women, and the consideration of their peculiar duties. These will furnish ample matter for a second volume [...]. (VRW 70)

If the current volume is 'only the first part',<sup>49</sup> what are the 'fresh illustrations' that have displaced an explicit discussion of the legal aspect of women's rights? I argue that these are a series of literary critiques, and that literary criticism is the central undertaking in *Rights of Woman*. Wollstonecraft's critiques expose ideologies of gender located in the writing of Milton, Rousseau and the conduct book writer John Gregory, among others. Wollstonecraft's theory of the ideology of gender, which she calls the 'prevailing opinion of a sexual character', is first presented and exemplified in her critique of Milton in Chapter 2 of *Rights of Woman*.

I will examine two aspects of Wollstonecraft's critique of Milton in this chapter. The first is an argument based on religious premises. The second is a set of techniques of textual analysis. These techniques have several purposes: they serve to demystify the text by making it an object of rational analysis; they establish

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<sup>49</sup> The title page of the first edition declares that this is 'Volume One' of *Rights of Woman*. The intention of writing a second volume which would focus on the legal, rather than the cultural, aspects of women's social standing is also expressed in a letter to William Roscoe, 3 January, 1792 (*Letters* 204-5).

Wollstonecraft as authoritative critic who may rightfully challenge an influential male writer; and they present Wollstonecraft's own theory of a literary public sphere and the significance of text, writer, reader and critic within it.

## Argument

Wollstonecraft's critique of Milton in *Rights of Woman* begins with a religious argument from which she draws social and political analogies. She notes that Milton's account of the creation in *Paradise Lost* places Adam over Eve in a spiritual hierarchy. Because Adam is defined as having the greater share of reason whereas Eve is endowed primarily with physical charms, he actually mediates God to Eve. He is her 'law' and she can only know God through him. Wollstonecraft makes this explicit in order to claim that Milton is impiously breaching a fundamental Protestant principle that no one should mediate between the individual worshiper and God. Wollstonecraft extends this fundamental religious argument, which can be found in the writings of Dissenters, to her own feminist agenda. She presents Milton in religious terms so that she can argue that women's social and political reform of women's roles is not discretionary policy but grounded on the same principles as the rights of men. In other words, in *Rights of Woman*, the extension of rights to women at the time of the American and French Revolutions is not merely based on the principle of logical consistency or legal precedent, but directly sourced in immutable principles.

It was common in radical discourse of Wollstonecraft's milieu to argue from religious premises to political principles. The move from religious to political self-determination was standard rhetoric in Richard Price's arguments for the revocation of the Test Acts, for the right to self-rule of the American colonists, and again in his more general appeals to universal rights at the time of the French Revolution. In Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* (1790), this appears in the notion of a political subjectivity grounded in individual 'duty to God' and then branching out into interactions with 'neighbours' that follow the golden rule (*VRM* 67). For both Price and Paine, the mediators who obstruct interactions between worshiper and God, and between political subjects, are presented as religious and political authorities, in both

the literal sense of actual 'magistrates' as well as in the ideological sense of a discourse which prevents men from interacting freely within a community. Wollstonecraft makes the same basic rhetorical move when she begins with a religious argument that establishes women's spiritual equality and then insists, on that basis, that they ought to have equal standing in society. In this sense, Wollstonecraft uses a familiar conceptual framework, but she does not restrict herself to social and political analogies. Through the specific manipulation, quotation, and analysis of text, Wollstonecraft treats the arguments of her opponents as a literary critic would. In this early section of *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft is explicit that it is literature itself, exemplified in Milton's influential account, which is the crucial and dangerous mediating force for women.

In her attack on Milton, Wollstonecraft's approach is informed directly by literary critical practice as it is found in periodicals such as Joseph Johnson's *Analytical Review*. In Wollstonecraft's reviews for this publication, she took part in defining a standard of 'sensibility' that emphasized sincerity over affectation. The reviews in the *Analytical Review* address individual texts, whereas *Rights of Woman* addresses a set of writers whom Wollstonecraft sees as part of a tradition of prescriptive writing. Coordinating a number of focused critiques of individual texts and writers, Wollstonecraft argues that the cumulative effect of a male literary tradition is a broad cultural phenomenon which affects men and women, writers and readers. This tradition of writing is made to include a French lawmaker (Talleyrand), radical forebears (Milton and Rousseau), and contemporary women writers (Anna Laetitia Barbauld). The fact that Milton is an iconic figure apparently makes Wollstonecraft's critique all the more necessary; works of 'genius' have 'the same tendency as more frivolous productions' (*VRW* Intro.73).

Another important component of Wollstonecraft's view of literature and society comes from her revision of the progressivist and republican language of her fellow radicals. A comparison of Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 of *Rights of Woman* clearly demonstrates this revisionism. In the first chapter, Wollstonecraft invokes a republican tradition which self-consciously finds its roots in the seventeenth century and which routinely includes Milton. He is one of the 'men of abilities' who improve 'the public mind' and thus contribute to the progress of humanity. However, in the opening line of Chapter 2, Milton is unceremoniously attacked as impious,

contradictory and even a representative of a male 'tyranny' (2.88), a serious charge in light of Milton's republican credentials. Thus, Wollstonecraft complicates the theory of progress that had appeared so uncritically in Chapter 1 by questioning one of its central icons.

The contrast between Wollstonecraft's adoption of an optimistic Enlightenment progress narrative in Chapter 1 and her dark view of a repressive male literary tradition which oppresses women is reflected in Wollstonecraft's metaphorical language. What was first presented as an inevitable, progressive expansion of the 'public mind', as 'seeds [...] sown' by 'men of abilities' now appears as a 'stream of popular opinion' which threatens to overwhelm individuals. The shift in Wollstonecraft's ideological posture from Chapter 1 to Chapter 2 is also marked by a shift in generic language, from sermonic proclamations of the progress of the mind to the polemical invective of pamphleteers and partisan periodical writers. However, Wollstonecraft's criticism is not gratuitously *ad hominem*; she employs a highly developed methodology of literary analysis in the service of her agenda. For example, Wollstonecraft highlights contradictions in the text by close reading, even on the level of the individual word; she compares passages with each other; she questions the assumption of oracular agency by juxtaposing her own moralist persona against Milton's. Ultimately, these techniques are employed in order to question Milton's authoritative status, and thus question his construction of femininity.

## **2.1 The Critique of Milton in Historical Context**

Radicals regularly invoked Milton as part of a tradition of resistance, but he was also the subject of a fierce polemic conducted in pamphlets and in periodicals. Wollstonecraft's literary critique of Milton is unusual in that it seems to contradict her personal and political associations with Price and other radicals who invoked Milton in a constructed tradition of revolutionary thinkers. John Jebb, a Dissenter, associate of Richard Price and fellow supporter of the French Revolution, makes it clear that Milton is a part of a hallowed political tradition:

I thought it virtue to believe, that my country was the peculiar care of heaven; and my ear hung delighted on the accents that pronounced her praise. It is, therefore, with pain inexpressible, that I now behold a nation, once ruled over by the immortal Alfred, the birthplace of Milton, and Hampden, and a Sidney, dishonoured and degraded by deeds of foul injustice. (qtd. in A. Page 226)

The ninth-century Saxon king Alfred is symbolic of English liberties which supposedly pre-existed the degrading hierarchies of feudalism. To refer to an ancient Anglo-Saxon tradition of lovers of liberty is to invoke the paradigm of the 'Norman Yoke', the notion that the long epoch of political subjugation is initiated with the invasion of William the Conqueror. In Jebb's mythical history Milton is 'canonized' by being grouped with ancient kings as well as with republican martyrs. Thomas Hampden (1594-1643) died in battle against Stuart royalists in 1643; Algernon Sidney, a republican writer and Parliamentarian, was executed in 1683 for alleged connection with the Rye House Plot, the attempted abduction of Charles II. Jebb's sentimental tribute illustrates one way in which a mythical/literary tradition was constitutive of radical identity, and attempted to legitimise political agendas.<sup>50</sup> As Caroline Robbins has pointed out in the central thesis of *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman*, much of the radical discourse of the late eighteenth century in Britain took its force from a self-consciously constructed tradition of writers (4). In speaking of this self-defined group, Robbins states that 'their continued existence and activity, albeit of a limited kind, served to maintain a revolutionary tradition and to link the histories of English struggles against tyranny in one century with those of American efforts for independence in another' (4-5).

While Robbins considers the group that included Price, Joseph Priestley and others, as the 'last' generation of Commonwealthmen, these political writers saw their tradition as cumulative and self-reproducing. Thus, when Jebb dies he joins the pantheon:

At the Revolution Society commemorative dinner in 1788 a toast to 'the immortal memory of Hampden, Pym, Russell, and Sydney' was followed

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<sup>50</sup> It is interesting to consider that Wollstonecraft's resistance to the republican canon recalls her argument in *Rights of Men*, in which she opposes the Edmund Burke's reliance on legal precedent as a form of political legitimacy. Wollstonecraft takes issue with Burke's term 'canonized forefathers' (*VRM* 42). For her to oppose the republican canon is logically consistent.



with one to 'the memory of Andrew Marvell, Milton, Locke, the late Mr. Hollis, and the late Dr. John Jebb'. (*History and Proceedings* 4) <sup>51</sup>

This list groups characters of widely differing accomplishments. Along with the martial, poetic, philosophical and political figures of the seventeenth century, there is the notable inclusion of Thomas Hollis (1720-1774), the Dissenter and reform writer who republished seventeenth-century political works in the 1760s.<sup>52</sup> This underscores the importance of the literary promulgation of the Dissenting cause, as we will see in the case of Joseph Johnson.

Milton is also catalogued in Price's *Discourse on the Love of Our Country* (1790), in which his writings are seen a part of an irresistible historical process of cumulative knowledge. Speaking of himself in third person, Price declares:

Happier far must he be, if [...] he has reason to believe he has been successful, and actually contributed, by his instructions, to disseminate among his fellow-creatures just notions of themselves, of their rights, of religion, and the nature and end of civil government. Such were *Milton*, *Locke*, *Sidney*, *Hoadley*, etc. in this country; such were *Montesquieu*, *Fénelon*, *Turgot*, etc. in France. They sowed a seed which has since taken root, and is now growing up to a glorious harvest. To the information they conveyed by their writings we owe those revolutions in which every friend to mankind is now exulting. (360-1)<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Pym (1584-1643) was a Parliamentarian and a leader of the opposition to Charles I. Andrew Marvell (1621-1678) wrote the praises of Cromwell in poetry, was MP for Hull, and published the anti-Episcopal tract *The Rehearsal Transposed* (1672-3).

<sup>52</sup> According to Robbins's scheme of classification, Hollis was a part of the second generation of Commonwealthmen. She associates him with the political agitators for reform who styled themselves 'Real' or 'Old' Whigs.

[V]ery important in the propaganda of the Real Whigs, it must be repeated, was the preservation of tracts and publications of books. The flood of print in 1698, the production of Dublin and Glasgow presses, as well as the editorial work of Richard Baron and Thomas Hollis of Lincoln's Inn, the tracts of the Society for Constitutional Information, all were "paper shot". (Robbins 17)

<sup>53</sup> Milton's works, especially *Areopagitica* (1644), were often cited by Burgh and Price. Bishop Hoadley (1676-1761), an Anglican bishop, endorsed a tolerant religious policy towards Dissenters. Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws* was source material for contract theory, especially as it emphasized the renewable rather than inherited nature of social and political contracts. Fénelon (1651-1715), a Catholic bishop, was persecuted by Louis XIV for his support of religious tolerance. Turgot (1727-1781) was the physiocrat economist who attempted the reform of the economy of the *ancien régime* before the appointment of Necker.

The Enlightenment discourse of progress is a component of the political progress narrative invoked by Price.<sup>54</sup> The effect of literature is seen as a combination of controlled and uncontrollable processes. The metaphors of ‘dissemination’, ‘sowing’ and ‘harvest’ integrate human will with a natural process. Individual writers consciously sow ideas. The fact that Price includes himself as one of these writers demonstrates how these ideas spread to each new generation, an inevitable effect which occurs as these writings become accessible to a literate public.

Jon Klancher has noted that from a more conservative point of view the metaphor of ‘dissemination’ in ‘fertile fields’ was not a pleasing prospect. He examines one anxious contemporary account of how dangerous ideas in France spread too quickly, unlike the well-regulated and properly resistant ‘circulatory’ patterns of communication in Britain. Klancher paraphrases Arthur Young’s impression of what Price’s opponents called Jacobin revolutionary writings in 1791-2:<sup>55</sup>

Dissemination takes place where there is no circulation, where there are no preformed patterns to guide the flow of language or ideas. What is disseminated “propagates” or reproduces itself without the orderly expansion of circulation. (*Audiences* 34)

From the radical point of view, the British situation was far from ideal. What is orderliness for Young turns out to be repression for the radicals and reformists. Price warns against state attempts to curtail literary activity and describes the adversarial situation by way of the central metaphor of the Enlightenment:

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<sup>54</sup> One contemporary statement of the Enlightenment progress narrative is found in Condorcet’s *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Human Mind* (1794).

No bounds have been fixed to the improvement of the human faculties; that the perfectibility of man is absolutely indefinite; that the progress of this perfectibility, henceforth above the control of every power that would impede it, has not other limit than the duration of the globe upon which nature has placed us. (388)

Joseph Priestley echoed this optimism in *Letters to the Right Honorable Edmund Burke* ([1791] 384).

<sup>55</sup> Arthur Young (1741-1820) was a merchant and owner of farmlands, upon which he experimented with progressive agricultural techniques. Young wrote four novels and founded a periodical, *The Universal Museum*. It was with an eye to gather information on the economy and agricultural methods that he wrote several travelogues, including the object of Klancher’s study: *Travels during the Years 1787, 1788, and 1789, Undertaken more Particularly with a View of Ascertaining the Cultivation, Resources, and National Prosperity, of the Kingdom of France* (1792). Klancher examines the organic metaphors which arise from Young’s literal purpose for his trip.

We may [...] learn our duty from the conduct of the oppressors of the world. They know that light is hostile to them, and therefore they labour to keep men in the dark. With this intention they have appointed licensers of the press; and, in Popish countries, prohibited the reading of the Bible. (*Discourse* 361)

Although this seems hyperbolic, the mention of 'licensers of the press' recognises that the radicals could very well be legally suppressed, as came to pass in later years.<sup>56</sup>

Wollstonecraft also cites a tradition of writers and their role in the 'progress of knowledge' in her initial statements in Chapter 1. Wollstonecraft's initially optimistic statements of the power of literature are expressed in two passages that show marked similarities to Price's formulations. One passage describes the 'expansion' of the public 'mind' against the machinations of power in the form of 'covert' opposition. The other narrows the focus to the effect of written texts. In Wollstonecraft's account, as in Price's, literature is part of an inexorable historical process:

In the infancy of society, when men were just emerging out of barbarism, chiefs and priests, touching the most powerful springs of savage conduct, hope and fear, must have had unbounded sway. An aristocracy, of course, is naturally the first form of government. But, clashing interests soon losing their equipoise, a monarchy and hierarchy soon break out of the confusion of ambitious struggles, and the foundation of both is secured by feudal tenures. This appears to be the origin of monarchical and priestly powers, and the dawn of civilization. But such combustible materials cannot long be pent up; and, getting vent in foreign wars and intestine insurrections, the people acquire some power in the tumult, which obliges their rulers to gloss over their oppression with a show of right. Thus, as wars, agriculture, commerce, and literature, expand the mind, despots are compelled to make covert corruption hold fast the power which was formerly snatched by open force. (*VRW* 1.87)

Wollstonecraft presents a view of history that gives prominence to what she calls the public 'mind', which is 'expanded' through experience, and through literacy. Although the passage is a simplistic version of a conjectural history of successive

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<sup>56</sup> In *Bourgeois Radicalism*, Kramnick describes the mob activity against Priestley and the indictment of Paine (142-5). In *The Politics of Language*, Olivia Smith describes the government-sponsored tracts which were meant to counteract the radical presses (68-109).

'stages' of human development,<sup>57</sup> the distinction between worldly experience and the activities of reading and writing is a useful paradigm for Wollstonecraft, who posits the existence of a 'medium of books', separate from the wider society, which surrounds and controls female identity.

Wollstonecraft claims that rulers must resort to 'covert corruption' when 'the people' gradually attain more power, primarily through an increase in knowledge. This passage comes at the end of Chapter 1, which has the clearest statements of Wollstonecraft's commitments to republican discourse. Earlier, Wollstonecraft identifies the traditional adversaries in that discourse: the Papacy ('an intriguing obscure adventurer [...] seizing the triple crown!'), the standing army ('a set of superficial idle young men'), Episcopal hierarchy ('the courtly mien of a bishop'), and absolutist monarchy ('pestiferous purple') (*VRW* 1.82, 86, 86, 87). In this context, the 'covert corruption' of 'despots' refers to the same adversaries that Price names in his polemics. The footnote to this passage seems to praise the republican pantheon of radical forebears:

Men of abilities scatter seeds that grow up and have a great influence on the forming opinion; and when once the public opinion preponderates, through the exertion of reason, the overthrow of arbitrary power is not very distant. (*VRW* n.1.87)

Wollstonecraft's language recalls Price's 'sowing' metaphors almost to the word, and poses the action of the 'men of abilities' as a historical process. The similarity to Price's formulation and the use of almost identical organic metaphors indicates that Wollstonecraft's list of writers overlaps with Price's. Milton would certainly be included under this general reference to an intellectual tradition.

The progressivist schema that Wollstonecraft apparently endorses in Chapter 1 of *Rights of Woman* is promptly subverted at the start of Chapter 2. Now it is Milton who plays the role of that 'power' which obstructs the rights of women, and because his writing is revered, it serves to make his power over women 'covert'. Thus, what first appears as a general Enlightenment binary, the opposition between the 'expansion of the public mind' and those who would obstruct it, becomes an

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<sup>57</sup> As in, for example, Adam Smith's 'Four-Stage' theory of human development in *Letters on Jurisprudence* (1762).

appropriated conceptual framework used for the purposes of challenging the anti-feminism in radical discourse itself.

Mary Poovey notes Wollstonecraft's iconoclasm:

Of all the cultural "authorities" she engages, Milton is clearly the most imposing, not only because of his pre-eminence in the English literary, political and religious traditions but because of the special veneration accorded to Milton by Johnson's London circle. (73)

However, Milton was not universally revered. In the latter half of the eighteenth century he appears in a literary context that is quite different from the canons of Jebb and Price. Milton was the subject of a fierce debate that was conducted over a series of periodical articles, pamphlets and biographies, a debate that was apparently set in motion by Samuel Johnson's 'Life of Milton' in *Lives of the Poets* (1779). The fierceness and personal nature of this debate informs Wollstonecraft's critique, as does the religious rhetoric of Dissent, two quite different generic languages.

The interlocutors in this debate identified the literary and biographical commentary as ultimately representative of political stances. Defenders of Milton were associated with radicalism and reform, and detractors identified as conservative.<sup>58</sup> Among the former was Francis Blackburne, an Anglican minister and friend of Richard Price.<sup>59</sup> In *Remarks on Johnson's Life of Milton* (1780), Blackburne claims that Johnson's distaste for Milton could have no other source than his own Toryism, or even Jacobitism:

Dr. Johnson's peace of mind required that this recovering taste of the public should not ripen into appetite, particularly for Milton's works, whose reputation he had formerly taken so much elegant pains to depreciate. The source of his disaffection to Milton's principles can be no secret to those who have been conversant in the controversies of the times. Dr. Johnson's early and well-known attachments will sufficiently account for it; and posterity will

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<sup>58</sup> William Lauder 'The Grand Impostor detected, or Milton convicted of forgery against King Charles I' (1754), reviewed in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, then under the direction of Samuel Johnson. Phillip Neve, *Cursory remarks on some of the ancient English poets, particularly Milton*, London, 1789. William Hayley, *The Life of John Milton*, Dublin 1797.

<sup>59</sup> Blackburne (1705-97) was Rector of Richmond with close connections to William Frend, Christopher Wyvill, Priestley, and Price. His daughter married the Unitarian John Disney.



be at no loss to determine whether our biographer's veneration was paid to the *White Rose* or the *Red*. (3-4)

The mention of the 'white rose', a Jacobite symbol, was a commonplace slur on Johnson's Tory politics. Blackburne accuses Johnson of two forms of prejudice, self-interest and party interest, which causes Johnson to politicise Milton, precisely what Blackburne himself is doing. He imputes to Johnson the fear that Milton's literary reputation would lend legitimacy to his republican politics, but, as we have seen, this is exactly what Blackburne's Dissenting associates hoped for.

Blackburne selects passages from the 'Life of Milton' that are meant to portray Johnson in the worst light, as peevish and petty, attempting to reinforce a simplistic popular image of this writer:

'[I]f we consider him as a prose-writer, he has neither the learning of a scholar, nor the manners of a gentleman. There is no force in his reasoning, no elegance in this style, and no taste in his composition.' (17)

'I am ashamed to relate what I fear is true; that Milton was the last student in either university that suffered the public indignity of corporal correction.' (28)

'In the distribution of his hours there was no hour of prayer, either solitary or with his household; omitting public prayer, he omitted all.' (109-110)

The provoking tone here should not be necessarily attributed to the famed idiosyncrasies of Johnson but was part of the language of this debate. Blackburne responds to each of these charges in turn by quoting the texts of other interlocutors from their contributions to the *Gentleman's Magazine* that he carefully cites (32, 109-110). From the point of view of stylistics, Blackburne's personal and closely argued critique of Johnson identifies *Remarks* as belonging to a different genre than Price's *Discourse*.

The breadth of generic languages employed in this struggle is indicative of how political debate was self-consciously embodied in literary discourse in the late eighteenth century. As Peter Cosgrove has pointed out, the generic heterogeneity itself implied a politically subversive stance: 'when the rigid stratification of form and content was tied to the hierarchical norms of social rank and moral value, this

circulation of the structural components of the different genres could also appear as a threat to the preservation of tradition' (110). In Chapter 2 of *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft's choice of opponent and close manner of attack marks her work as more in the genre of politicized literary criticism than in Price's high-toned speech in the *Discourse*. The problem is that she seems to come in on the wrong side.

## 2.2 Religious Rhetoric in Wollstonecraft's Criticism

Religious argument is the first level of attack in Wollstonecraft's critique of Milton, and her critique of the text combines with an attack upon the author himself:

[W]hen he tells us that women are formed for softness and *sweet attractive grace*, I cannot comprehend his meaning, unless, in the true Mahometan strain, he meant to deprive us of souls, and insinuate<sup>60</sup> that we were beings *only* designed by sweet attractive grace, and docile blind obedience, to gratify the senses of man when he can no longer soar on the wing of contemplation. (VRW 2.88; my emphases)

The use of passive verbs, by eliding the subject, could refer either to God as designer or the poet himself who has 'formed' Eve in the shape most desirable to him, a significant equivocation. The author is further personified by the use of a tableau in which he rests from his poetic 'flight' and is sexually entertained by the docile woman he has literally created. The actual Milton is entertained by the generic Eve.

Wollstonecraft's ad hominem attacks have been described as a symptom of Wollstonecraft's repressed 'desire' which surfaces in 'outbursts' (Brody 70). Harsh personal invective appears throughout *Rights of Woman*. John Gregory, the respected conduct book writer, who died the year after composing his sentimental conduct

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<sup>60</sup> Since Wollstonecraft is already citing from Book IV of *Paradise Lost*, it is likely that the word 'insinuate' which appears later in the same section of the poem, is a facetious jab at Milton, whose flattering description of Eve apparently resembles the language of the serpent. Here are the relevant lines from Book IV:

[...] close the serpent sly  
*Insinuating*, wove with Gordian twine  
His braided train, and of his fatal guile  
Gave proof unheeded; [...]  
(*Paradise Lost* 4:347-350; my emphasis)

book, *Legacy to His Daughters*, is accused of addressing his daughters in ‘not quite so delicate’ sexual terms (5.170). Anna Laetitia Barbauld is charged with intellectual cowardice (4.122-3), James Fordyce’s ‘affected style’ is known to provoke ‘disgust’ among ‘rational men’, and his prose is ‘whining’ and his text ‘disgust[ing]’ (5.162-3, n.5.163), Hester Piozzi is unoriginal (5.171-2), and Chesterfield is a ‘libertine’ and a ‘rascal’, while his system of education is ‘unmanly’, and ‘immoral’ (4.126, 5.175). However, as we have seen in the Blackburne/Johnson debate, invective was a rhetorical tool with clear political functions.<sup>61</sup> Gary Kelly documents that the 1790s was a time ‘when principles were invariably traced to personality’ (Kelly ‘Introduction’ vii).<sup>62</sup> The politics of personality are an important component of Wollstonecraft’s critical practice. Wollstonecraft uses personal invective in practically every engagement with literary opponents, but, as we will see, it is often a prelude to a serious discussion.

Thus, on the more equal terms of literary disputants, Wollstonecraft initiates a conversation between herself as critical narrator and Milton as an author who has less than noble motives for describing woman in a particular way. Wollstonecraft places Milton’s text in a historical tradition of male ‘invention’:

Probably the prevailing opinion that woman was created for man, may have taken its rise from Moses’ poetical story; yet as very few, it is presumed, who have bestowed any serious thought on the subject ever supposed Eve was, literally speaking, one of Adam’s ribs, the deduction must be allowed to fall to the ground, or only be so far admitted as it proves that man, from the remotest antiquity, found it convenient to exert his strength to subjugate his companion, and his invention to show that she ought to have her neck bent under his yoke [...]. (*VRW* 2.95)

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<sup>61</sup> For an indispensable discussion of Wollstonecraft from the psycho-sexual point of view, see Cora Kaplan, ‘Wild Nights: Pleasure / Sexuality / Feminism’.

<sup>62</sup> Kelly cites the affection that Wollstonecraft’s radical friends had for Rousseau’s works as an illustration of how ‘principle was traced to personality’ at this time:

Their [English Jacobins] model was Rousseau. The Protestant son of republican Geneva spoke to Dissenters, Revolutionaries, and Enlightenment rationalists alike, but especially to the English Jacobin novelists, who were attempting to renovate fiction with materials drawn from life. His *Confessions* revealed that his philosophical, educational, and political writings arose out of his own peculiar character, background, and experience, and that his novel *La Nouvelle Heloise* welled from the deepest levels of his personality. (Kelly ‘Introduction’ viii)

Wollstonecraft argues not only that Milton is a prejudicial interpreter of Scripture, but also that Scripture itself must be interrogated. It is the 'invention', of writers such as Moses and Milton, that is, their ability to create prescriptive images of woman, which has contributed to women's oppression.

Once Milton is portrayed as a fallible interpreter of Scripture, he is susceptible to a vigorous critique. Thus, Wollstonecraft proceeds to judge the moral implications of Milton's delineation of Eve. As Susan Wolfson has pointed out, 'to link poet Moses to poet Milton is to treat both as storytellers, subject to literary analysis' (169). In the first passage above, Wollstonecraft quotes the phrase 'sweet attractive grace', referring to the passage in *Paradise Lost* in which Eve is introduced:

Not equal, as their sex not equal seemed;  
For contemplation he and valour formed,  
For softness she and sweet attractive grace,  
He for God only, she for God in him  
(*Paradise Lost* 4:296-299)

This passage is not quoted in full in *Rights of Woman*, but is evoked through a single phrase, indicating Wollstonecraft's configuration of an erudite readership. In her first appearance in *Paradise Lost*, Eve is not described individually but in comparison to Adam. The context of this passage is a scene in which Satan observes the couple for the first time. The first line here records the perceptions of the onlooker Satan, to whom it 'seem[s]' that man and woman are unequal. Satan can only perceive the outer, physical characteristics of the pair. But then narrative agency shifts in order to tell us something of the essence of man and woman. It is the narrator himself who declares what is beneath the physical surface, and (Milton) declares that Adam is endowed with reason and courage.

As Frank Kermode has pointed out, Milton 'uses the epic poet's privilege of intervening in his own voice, and he does this to regulate the reader's reaction' (106). For Wollstonecraft, narrator and author are conflated, precisely in the service of counteracting Milton's effect upon the reader. Thus, Wollstonecraft's mode of addressing Milton as both the author and the speaker behind the speaking characters comes both from the practices of literary engagement in periodical culture, in which

direct personal address is typical, but is extrapolated from assumptions of authoritative agency which are implicitly claimed in the epic poem itself.

The short excerpt above contains the two themes that Wollstonecraft takes up against Milton in this section of *Rights of Woman*: Milton's denial of reason to Eve, and the principle that Adam must mediate between Eve and God precisely because he has been imbued with reason. Wollstonecraft, in her own effort to 'regulate the reader's reaction', quotes directly from another part of Book Four and uses typography to alert the reader to this impious (anti-Protestant) notion in the poem:

'To whom thus Eve with *perfect beauty* adorn'd.  
My author and disposer, what thou bid'st  
*Unargued* I obey; so God ordains;  
God is *thy law*, *thou mine*: to know no more  
Is woman's *happiest* knowledge and her *praise*.'  
(VRW 2.89; *Paradise Lost* 4:634-8; Wollstonecraft's emphases)

At this point in the narrative, Adam has just suggested that it is wise for them to sleep so that they can face the next day refreshed and energized (4:610-33). The 'docile blind obedience' of Eve is implicit in the fact that she praises Adam for the mere suggestion that sleep will refresh them. It is 'with perfect beauty' that Eve recognizes Adam's natural authority, and her 'perfect beauty' is equated with being agreeable, or 'unargued'. As in the allusion above, Eve's beauty is linked with her relative lack of reason. She recognizes her intellectual inferiority and therefore concedes that Adam is her 'law'.

Wollstonecraft's argument to this point, based on her allusions and quotation from *Paradise Lost*, is meant to flesh out her first (facetious) accusation, that Milton's denial of reason to Eve must imply that she has no soul. But Wollstonecraft now presents another, contradictory, passage from *Paradise Lost*, in which Eve is imagined as a rational companion to Adam:

'Hast Thou not made me here Thy substitute,  
And these inferior\* far beneath me set?  
Among *unequals* what society  
Can sort, what harmony or true delight?  
Which must be mutual, in proportion due  
Given and received; but in *disparity*  
The one intense, the other still remiss

\* [animals]



Cannot well suit with either, but soon prove  
Tedious alike; of *fellowship* I speak  
Such as I seek, fit to participate  
All rational delight –'

(VRW 2.89-90; *Paradise Lost* 8:381-91; Wollstonecraft's emphases)

This passage is taken from a point in the narrative at which Eve has yet to be created, and Adam is appealing to God for a companion. Adam is lonely among creatures who cannot reason, 'these inferior'. In contrast to the earlier passage in which Eve is 'formed' only to be beautiful, here she is a rational being, at least as she is imagined by Adam. The emphases are meant to show that Milton conceives of the ideal woman as the rational companion of man, and that both are superior to 'the brute creation', referring to Wollstonecraft's belief that reason is the criterion that establishes humanity. She accounts for Milton's confusion by stating that 'into similar inconsistencies are great men often led by their senses' (2.89), and it is the inconsistency itself which further underlines a conscious authorship as opposed to a transparent oracular poet.

As I have mentioned, typography is a key component of Wollstonecraft's critical methodology. The emphasised words above can be assembled into a paraphrase of the passage: 'perfect beauty ... unargued ... thy law, thou mine ... happiest ... praise'. This reduces the text to a chain of propositions, sidestepping the 'eloquence' of Milton and exposing the connection between flattery and condescension. For Wollstonecraft, to flatter is to infantilize, as she has stated in the introduction: 'My own sex, I hope, will excuse me, if I treat them like rational creatures, instead of flattering their *fascinating* graces, and viewing them as if they were in a state of perpetual childhood' (Intro.75). In the second passage, in which Adam imagines a 'rational' equal, Wollstonecraft's emphases have a different rhetorical function. Here the trail of emphasized words does not trace a logical proposition, as in the first passage, but is meant to define a simple attribute through a contrast: Milton's Adam is uncomfortable with 'unequals' and 'disparity', and yearns for 'fellowship'. These interventions display the critic's power to physically alter the original text.

Wollstonecraft introduces the passage above by remarking that 'in the following lines Milton seems to coincide with me', continuing her staged dialogue with Milton.

Joan Mulholland has argued Wollstonecraft's shifting use of the "I", present the 'author as agent', which permits readers to imagine themselves in 'discursive relation with the author', terming such utterances 'speech acts' (187). The relationship implied in this portion of *Rights of Woman* is of a reader witnessing a conversation between a female critic and imposing male authority on terms of equality. Wollstonecraft further mitigates Milton's authority by reminding the reader that Milton is not *reporting* the story of Genesis as inspired muse, but *fictionalising* it as 'inventor', that is, as a fallible human author. She maintains the image of Milton-as-author by focusing on the act of invention: 'he *makes* Adam thus expostulate with his Maker' (*VRW* 2.89; my emphasis).

Clifford Siskin has pointed out that in this period the author was the means into the text, 'a practice that proved crucial to the formation of modern literary institutions: the Author "before" Work. We engage the latter *through* the former' (*Work* 162; Siskin's emphasis). Wollstonecraft's interactions with Milton do not necessarily contrast personalities as much as doctrinal positions. In the following passage the issue is educational doctrine. In response to Milton's notion that women are more beautiful when they are 'unargued', that is, do not speak, Wollstonecraft remarks:

These are exactly the arguments I have used to children, but I have added, your reason is now gaining strength, and, till it arrives at some degree of maturity, you must look up to me for advice, - then you ought to *think*, and only rely on God. (*VRW* 2.89)

The point is to characterise Milton as an opponent of the rational education of women. This passage poses a contrast between Wollstonecraft's experience and Milton's 'invention'.<sup>63</sup> The next passage continues the discussion on education:

In treating therefore of the manners of women, let us, disregarding sensual arguments, trace what we should endeavour to *make them* in order to co-operate, if the expression be not too bold, with the Supreme Being. (*VRW* 2.90; my emphasis)

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<sup>63</sup> This motif emerges again when Wollstonecraft moves on to critique Rousseau's claim that little girls are addicted to dolls and self-ornamentation: 'I have probably, had an opportunity of observing more girls in their infancy than J.J. Rousseau' (*VRW* 3.112).

Wollstonecraft challenges Milton's authority by accusing him of impiety and sensuality, and presents herself as representative of a rational social consensus. In this role she now declares that 'we' ought to abandon such authorities as Milton, and devise an educational system that is moral and rational.

This returns to the tone of the Dedication, in which Wollstonecraft discusses the issue of French national education on equal footing with the French delegate Talleyrand. It is in this authoritative role that Wollstonecraft continues to deliver her thoughts on education in Chapter 2:

By individual education, I mean, for the sense of the word is not precisely defined, such an attention to a child as will slowly sharpen the senses, form the temper, regulate the passions as they begin to ferment, and set the understanding to work before the body arrives at maturity. (VRW 2.90)

As Wollstonecraft has shifted from a specific literary analysis of Milton's poetry to general statements about education, she is not speaking about individual authors any longer, but larger societal phenomena. She continues to broaden the perspective:

To prevent any misconstruction, I must add, that I do not believe that a private education can work the wonders which some sanguine writers have attributed to it. Men and women must be educated, in a great degree, by the opinions and manners of the society they live in. In *every age* there has been a stream of popular opinion that has carried all before it, and given a family character, as it were, to the century. (VRW 2.90)

Wollstonecraft presents the paradigm of successive cultural ideologies, each of which she conceptualises as 'a family character'. Wollstonecraft claims that it is difficult for even the most educated to avoid the cultural assumptions of their age.

Comparing this statement with Wollstonecraft's first historical paradigm, in Chapter 1, of the inevitable march of awareness throughout history, we now have a darker prognosis, one that seems almost inescapable:

For men of the greatest abilities have seldom had sufficient strength to rise above the surrounding atmosphere; and if the *pages of genius* have always been blurred by the *prejudices of the age*, some allowance should be made for a sex, who, like kings, always see things through a false medium. (VRW 3.111)

Apparently, great men, including great writers, are as subject to the 'family character' of an age as women are. The possibility of escape from 'the atmosphere' of opinion operates through a belief in individual effort: 'whatever effect circumstances have on the abilities, every being may become virtuous by the exercise of its own reason' (2.90). Wollstonecraft presents herself as a separate and resistant critical individual and faults her opponents for creating texts which suppress women's reason. But she also faults 'great men' for themselves succumbing to the pressures of their age. As Landes has pointed out in discussing eighteenth-century conceptions of the literary sphere, the key distinction between a literary public sphere with potential for political change and one lacking this potential is whether that sphere is a collection of critical and dissenting voices or whether it serves to dispense opinion in a normative process ('Reconsideration' 154).

Wollstonecraft drives towards the conclusion that Milton stands between woman and her self-knowledge, or between women and God. For Wollstonecraft, Milton's mediation of women is simultaneously a theological problem and a problem of authorship:

For if it be allowed that women were destined by Providence to acquire human virtues, and, by the exercise of their understandings, that stability of character which is the firmest ground to rest our future hopes upon, they must be permitted to turn to the fountain of light, and not forced to shape their course by the twinkling of a *mere satellite*. (*VRW* 2.89; my emphasis)

As Barbara Taylor has pointed out, Wollstonecraft opposes Milton's gendered spiritual hierarchy by 'invok[ing] the Protestant imperative for direct dealing with one's Maker. If no priest may stand between creature and Creator, why should a mere man stand between a woman and her God?' (*Imagination* 105). The paradigm of mediation gives rise to fruitful analogies. Like Adam, Milton is a 'mere satellite' who cannot adequately mediate woman's knowledge. If the exalted Milton cannot be trusted as a mediator of knowledge, then perhaps other forms of mediation may be questioned as well.

### 2.3 Political and Psychological Models of Mediation in *Rights of Woman*.

For Dissenters such as Price, the criticism of mediation was aimed at the reformation of political representation and cessation of interference of the state church with individual worship. Similarly, in Wollstonecraft's account, the discussion centres upon the concept of mediation; Adam is Eve's 'law' and the conduit through which she 'knows' God. Thus, a Scriptural image of mediation becomes the analogy for social and literary forms of mediation. Just as Adam stands between woman and God, Milton himself mediates knowledge to woman. Conflating the text with the author, Wollstonecraft moves from these premises to the conclusion that Milton's text itself is a mediating authority, interfering with women's ability to conceive of themselves as spiritual and therefore political individuals. Wollstonecraft's conclusion is that 'man', in the form of a male literary tradition, mediates woman to herself, and thus interferes with the basic formation of her identity. Wollstonecraft's focus on what is a form of inner, or psychological, mediation stands in contrast to critiques of mediation in Price or Paine, which focus on the problem of mediation *between* men. As I will show, they posit their male political subjects as fully formed, already certain of their religious identity and political rights.

The idea of direct communion with God is a general feature of certain branches of Protestant thought as it distinguishes itself from the Roman Catholic doctrine of intercession, but radicals of Wollstonecraft's time explicitly analogize the principle of religious self-determination in political terms. Richard Price's *A Discourse on the Love of Our Country* ends with the declaration that he envisions the end of 'the dominion of priests' (370). In a similar juxtaposition of the religious and the political, Joseph Priestley characterizes the English Reformation as an example of progress that could be an analogy to political reform: 'had our ancestors, three centuries ago, persevered in this spirit, we had been blind and priest-ridden papists' (*Government* 110). In *Essay on the First Principles of Government* (1771), Priestley imagines a state composed of self-sufficient male citizens (113), rather than subjects who rely on ecclesiastical and political mediators. In both Price and Priestley, injunctions against 'priestcraft', an appropriation of an anti-Catholic slur, become a criticism of the political mediation of MPs, magistrates and other officials.



Richard Price's earlier work provides a clear connection between religious and civic principles. *Observations on Civil Liberty* (1776) is Price's vindication of the American colonists and their claims to individual 'liberties', which include the specific agenda of direct representation and an expectation of accountability for the taxes they pay. At the start of the pamphlet, Price distinguishes four sorts of liberty: physical, moral, religious and civil. The religious form of 'liberty' stresses freedom from outside interference:

He [...] who, in religion, cannot govern himself by his convictions of religious duty, but is obliged to receive formularies of faith, and to practice modes of worship imposed upon him by others, wants *Religious Liberty*. (6)

The idea of self-governance appears here as a demand for the right to private worship, taking it out of the sphere of control by the state church and placing it in the hands of individuals. Price states that the principle shared by all forms of liberty is 'Self-direction, or Self-government' (5). Price stresses the *active* principle of liberty and describes the loss of individual liberty in the face of arbitrary power. '[T]he subject of it is a mere passive instrument which never *acts*, but is always *acted upon*' (6). Upon this basis, grounding political self-determination upon what he sees as firm religious principles, Price goes on to defend the rights of the American colonists.

Fifteen years later, the conceptual framework remains the same; in *A Discourse on the Love of Our Country*, Price's concern is again with a reform of political representation. At one point, Price gives a synopsis of his chain of reasoning, revealing schematically the way in which his argument has moved from a religious to a political context. Price first presents the issue of the right to worship: '[T]hose who dislike that mode of worship which is prescribed by public authority, ought [...] to set up a separate worship for themselves' (362). From here, Price moves to a political understanding of 'liberty': 'An enlightened and virtuous country must be a free country. It cannot suffer invasions of its rights, or bend to tyrants' (363). The *Discourse* now moves from these generic statements to the question of actual political mediation between political subjects. It should be borne in mind, however, that Price aims at the reform of state structures and not revolution. He exhorts his audience to obey the officials of the state: 'I should [...] exemplify our duty to our

country by observing farther, that it requires us to obey its laws, and to respect its magistrates' but insists that these officials should be no more than 'servants of the public'. By re-defining magistrates as direct expressions of the public will, Price imagines a public which communes with itself: 'Civil laws are regulations agreed upon by the community for gaining these ends; and civil magistrates are officers appointed by the community for executing these laws. Obedience, therefore, to the laws and the magistrates, are necessary expressions of our regard to the community' (363-5). For Price, mediation is acceptable only insofar as political and religious functionaries facilitate interactions in accordance to the will of the community.

Price's conception of 'the community' is explicable in terms of Habermas's model of the public sphere, according to which private individuals form a collective public which can then assume political power (29). However, Price's understanding of the nature of the subjects who comprise a polity does not correspond to Habermas's description. For Habermas, the subjectivity of participants in a political public sphere is grounded in their relationships within the family. This 'flowed from the wellspring of a specific subjectivity. The latter had its home, literally, in the sphere of the patriarchal conjugal family' (43). Price's view of subjectivity, on the other hand, relies primarily on the religious/ontological principles that are expressed in his principle of religious autonomy, which he significantly puts in terms of 'governing' oneself (*Sermons* 6, above).<sup>64</sup> Price's view of mediation is that which either prevents an individual from worshipping as he sees fit or comes between fully formed members of a community. In other words, mediation for Price restricts behaviour but does not dictate identity. When that mediation takes on a concrete political form, as in Price's concern with 'magistrates', it operates *between* members of the community and not within them. For Price, the interference with either individual right to worship or with the communing of a society with itself is the extent of his argument against mediators.

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<sup>64</sup> To be sure, Habermas recognises the importance of spiritual subjectivity, but sees it as anterior to this period: 'The so-called freedom of religion historically secured the first sphere of private autonomy' (11). Habermas refers here to the Reformation and the Protestant understanding of religion as 'a private matter'. Religious subjectivity is situated historically *before* other forms of emerging 'privacy', such as the subjectivity that is based on the conjugal relations in the family (29). Price, I emphasise, conceives of the political subject as first of all a religious subject. Price's 'worshipper', the prototype of the citizen, is already certain of his 'dislike' for other forms of worship and already possessed of 'conviction' before the actions of either literary or concrete political mediation.

Jon Klancher points out that it was Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, framed as a response to Price's *Discourse*, which turned radical attention to textual forms of mediation. He finds that Burke's is a 'triumphantly authorial' language which invokes a complex set of authorities and figures. Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Men* and Paine's *Rights of Man* recognize what Klancher calls Burke's 'mixed narrative and argumentative modes' as a form of ideological mediation that 'reflects' and thus diminishes the 'light of Enlightenment'. Klancher points out that Paine's text 'will found radical discourse upon a radical critique of such authorship itself' (*Audiences* 105). The binary between the 'sincere' author and the 'elegant' language of her antagonists is evident in Wollstonecraft's declaration at the start of *Rights of Woman* that she refuses to 'cull' her words or 'dazzle by the elegance of [her] language' (Intro.82). This is an illustration of Klancher's distinction between an affected 'authorial' language and the (allegedly) unaffected language of radical sincerity. However, I find that, unlike Wollstonecraft, Paine's primary concern is with the way in which this form of mediation obstructs relationships *between* political subjects, not *within* them.

When Paine says, in the conclusion to *Rights of Man*, that 'Man is not the enemy of man, but through the medium of a false system of Government' (146), he is speaking about the possibility that one country may go to war against another: 'Each Government accuses the other of perfidy, intrigue, and ambition, as a means of heating the imagination of their respective Nations, and incensing them to hostilities' (146). When Paine writes of 'heating the imagination' Klancher interprets this as literally an issue of personal identity:

Paine's "Man" has been divided from himself by power, by "false Government," by a "succession of barriers, or sort of turnpike gates." Mediated to himself by kings, parliaments, magistrates, priests, and nobles, man becomes enemy to himself. (*Audiences* 108)

Klancher sees Paine's comments as a rejection of precedent as the basis of political identity. He quotes a passage from *Rights of Man* in which Paine finds that precedent, ever retreating into history in the search for the origin of right, can never offer a reliable 'constitutive' property. But Klancher's assumption is that for Paine political forms of mediation are metaphors for psychological forms of mediation.

However, I interpret the phrase 'mediated to himself' to mean that a community, as a collective body are prevented from communicating *amongst* themselves. In opposition to the Burkean constitution, Paine poses the living will of a contemporary community, rather than the dead hand of precedence, and this literally refers to actual collections of individuals. A careful examination of Paine's statements suggests that he is speaking about public interactions *between* men rather than within them. This is evident in the full passage in *Rights of Man* that Klancher has quoted:

The duty of man is not a wilderness of turnpike gates, through which he is to pass by tickets from one to the other. It is plain and simple, and consists but of two points: His duty to God, which every man must feel; and with respect to his neighbour, to do as he would be done by. (67)

Paine envisions society as a set of interactions between political equals, or 'neighbours' who individually worship as they please. He thus summarises the 'duties' of man as first, the right to religious worship and second, a respect for others' liberties. In Paine's *Rights of Man*, the idea is that one political subject is alienated from another by the mediation of unjust law, unjust representation and unjust taxation; and it thus appears that Paine does not stress divisions within individual psyches.

Both Paine's *Rights of Man* and Price's work concern themselves with the relationship of one political subject to another, but for Wollstonecraft, literature mediates a woman's ability to use her reason. These ideas appear in a passage in which Wollstonecraft again uses literary references to Milton to make an argument against interior mechanisms of mediation:

Reason is [...] the simple power of improvement; or, more properly speaking, of discerning truth. Every individual is in this respect a world in itself. [...] Yet outwardly ornamented with elaborate care, and so adorned to delight man, 'that with honour he may love', the soul of woman is not allowed to have this distinction, and man ever placed between her and reason, she is always represented as only created to see through a gross medium, and to take things on trust. (VRW 4.122)

For Wollstonecraft, it is Milton's *literary* construction of femininity that stands between woman and 'truth'. Milton's definition of woman is an intrusion, a 'gross

medium' between the perceptive faculty of 'reason' and 'truth'. For Wollstonecraft, this 'truth' is the core of selfhood, because without the interference of the 'gross medium' of man's mediation woman cannot see herself as 'individual', a 'world in itself'; to 'dismiss these theories' is to consider 'woman as a whole' (4.122). Wollstonecraft sees the mediation of literary men such as Milton in a social and legal sense but is aware that they work to erect barriers within women themselves.

## 2.4 Two Modern Assessments of Wollstonecraft's Critique of Milton

In this section I present two modern studies that examine Wollstonecraft's engagement with Milton. One is Susan Gilbert's 'Patriarchal Poetry and Women Readers: Reflections on Milton's Bogey'. Gilbert's central claim is that Wollstonecraft, like many other women writers, cannot escape the accumulated historical force of Milton's literary figure, his 'bogey'. The other is Mary Poovey's *The Proper Lady*, which also suggests that Milton impedes the full expression of Wollstonecraft's argument, which Poovey claims is evident in Wollstonecraft's use of quotations and footnotes. Both of these studies claim that Wollstonecraft is intimidated by Milton, one claiming an effect upon the narrative persona of *Rights of Woman* and the other referring to the critical apparatus and stylistic properties of Wollstonecraft's writing. I argue that it is precisely these two parameters, critical agency and critical methodology, which constitute Wollstonecraft's authoritative literary criticism.

Gilbert begins with a passage from *A Room of One's Own* (1929), in which Virginia Woolf states that literate women must 'look past Milton's bogey, for no human being should shut out the view' (368). For Gilbert, Woolf's statement exemplifies the feelings of most women writers who follow Milton;<sup>65</sup> Milton's stature is a fact of the literary landscape. Drawing from Harold Bloom's theory of the 'anxiety of influence', Gilbert argues that women writers, including Wollstonecraft,

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<sup>65</sup> Gilbert compiles a historical list of women writers who have struggled with 'Milton's bogey': Besides Woolf, these are Margaret Cavendish, Anne Finch, Mary Shelley, the Brontës, Emily Dickinson, Elizabeth B. Browning, George Eliot, Christina Rossetti, H.D., Sylvia Plath, Gertrude Stein, and Anais Nin (368).



are overawed by male predecessors, and Milton most of all. To paraphrase Bloom's basic formulation, all great poets must feel the inescapable anxiety of following great precursors, and this results in a work which is in itself an expression of that anxiety: 'A poem is not an overcoming of anxiety, but is that anxiety' (NTC 1804). He includes critics amongst those who are subject to this anxiety, claiming that they are doubly oppressed, by poets *and* other critics: 'a critic has more parents' (1805).

Gilbert reaffirms Bloom's generational schema:

Milton is for women what Harold Bloom (who might here be paraphrasing Woolf) calls "the great Inhibitor, the Sphinx who strangles even strong imaginations in their cradles". ('Bogey' 370; Bloom 32)

Gilbert argues that Milton's gender acts to negate not only female literary creation but also female selves. Milton's assumption of divine agency reinforces his power over women writers, which implicitly reminds them of their 'secondness' and their 'otherness' (370), a usage which recalls de Beauvoir. Gilbert argues that in the founding myth, Milton and the 'Creator' are conflated: 'For whatever Milton is to the male imagination, to the female imagination Milton and the inhibiting Father – the Patriarch of patriarchs – are one' (370). The male God is the original good, and because he is gendered male, those who are not identified with him must be the opposite, not only 'other' in identity, but in moral agency as well:

Indeed, as a figure of the true artist, God's emissary and defender on earth, Milton himself, as he appears in *Paradise Lost*, might well be as much akin to God as they themselves were to Satan, Eve, or Sin. (380)

Milton's assumption of oracular status gives him a set of tools unavailable to the woman writer:

Like God, for instance, Milton-as-epic-speaker creates heaven and earth (or their verbal equivalents) out of a bewildering chaos of history, legend, and philosophy. Like God, he has mental powers that penetrate to the furthest corners of the cosmos he has created, to the depths of hell and the heights of heaven, soaring with "no middle flight" toward ontological subjects "unattempted yet in Prose or Rhyme". Like God, too, he knows the consequence of every action and event, his comments upon them indicating an almost divine consciousness of the simultaneity of past, present, and future. Like God, he punishes Satan, rebukes Adam and Eve, moves angels

from one battle station to another, and grants all mankind glimpses of apocalyptic futurity, when a "greater Man" shall arrive to restore paradisaical bliss. And like God – like the Redeemer, like the Creator, like the Holy Ghost – he is male. (380)

For Gilbert, the narrator of *Paradise Lost* claims authority by identifying himself as God's 'emissary' or 'defender on earth'. Milton as epic poet presents himself as a transparent medium; the events he narrates do not derive from his own experience but have been passed on to him from the 'muse', and he in turn faithfully relates these as truth. Women writers do not have the same access to truth because they are constitutionally 'other' – they can never be either the male God or the male oracle.

Gilbert claims that even those women who recognize the problem of Milton's influence cannot fully free themselves of it: 'the shadow of Milton's bogey seems to darken the page as Woolf writes' (381). On the other hand, Gilbert argues that a critique of Milton, because of his very centrality, is especially attractive to women who seek radical social change. Gilbert places Wollstonecraft in this category, stating that she is 'obsessed with the apocalyptic social transformations a revision of Milton might bring about' (377). In Gilbert's formulation women writers are forced to assume a role already within *Paradise Lost*, 'identifying at their most rebellious with Satan, at their least with rebellious Eve' (377).

Gilbert does not theorize other possible roles for women writers and this fits in with her basic thesis that Milton assumes an unavoidable presence in the Western literary imagination. Her own critical stance, however, characterized by an emotional tone of challenge, and relying to a great degree on Bloom's formulation, nevertheless, places itself outside of these Miltonian roles. She privileges the persona of the modern literary critic, and its claims to a reliable scientific methodology. In a response to an antagonist who claims that Gilbert hastily categorises Milton as a 'misogynist', Gilbert insists her 'interest is not primarily in Milton and Milton's (finally unknowable) intentions but with [...] the implications of Milton's ideas for women' and defends the placement of Milton in a 'long tradition of literary misogyny' (*Forum* 321). Gilbert's focus upon Milton's effect on women writers rather than upon his personal motivations is an important component of her critical methodology. However, Wollstonecraft as a critic could claim a similar privileged, and useful, vantage point.

Gilbert's treatment of Milton contains many elements that are already present in Wollstonecraft's critique. Both Gilbert and Wollstonecraft cite Milton's self-investiture of divine agency and his self-appointed right to define woman. Gilbert insists that the 'bogey' of Milton is an iconic presence that inevitably inhibits female writing. This 'bogey' is at work in Gilbert's assumption that Wollstonecraft can only operate from within a role already assigned by Milton. She insists on framing Wollstonecraft's feminism as a rebellion in the 'Satanic' role:

Mary Wollstonecraft, whose *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* often reads like an outraged commentary on *Paradise Lost*, combined a Blakean enthusiasm for the French Revolution – at least in its early days – with her "pre-Romantic" reverence for the Satanic Sublime and her feminist anger at Milton's misogyny. But complicated as it was, that complex of interrelated feelings was not hers alone. For not only have feminism and Romantic radicalism been consciously associated in the minds of many women writers, Byronically (and Satanically) rebellious visionary politics have often been used by women as metaphorical disguises for sexual politics. (Gilbert 'Bogey' 377)

Gilbert's catalogue of literary associations refers to a number of possible sources for Wollstonecraft's oppositional stance, but none of these are presented as *intellectual* influences. Her support for the French Revolution is seen as 'Blakean enthusiasm', a description suggesting apocalyptic and millennial sentiment, rather than, say, an expression of contemporary radical politics. Her understanding of the 'Sublime' is a form of 'reverence'. The adverb 'Byronically' suggests a self-conscious rebel. Gilbert concludes with the idea that Wollstonecraft, like other women writers, must assume disguises in order to make their arguments.

Ultimately, what Gilbert leaves out of her account of Wollstonecraft and other women is precisely that critical agency which she grants to herself. It is entirely possible to imagine Wollstonecraft's persona in *Rights of Woman* (if we follow Gilbert's metaphoric conceptualization of literary roles) as a rebellious Eve. However, considering the exact features of Wollstonecraft's literary and argumentative approach, her persona is formed after a more concrete model, and one that was readily available in her literary context, the eighteenth-century literary commentator. Thus, she places herself on equal footing with Milton, just as Gilbert does. Like Gilbert, Wollstonecraft's critical agency is legitimised by a set of

techniques and a generic language which provides critical distance from the target text.

Wollstonecraft's account of the complexities in Milton's definition of Eve is a less specialised approach to Milton than Gilbert's. Wollstonecraft moves from a critique of Milton's conception of woman to broad statements about the influence of literature, but also makes analogies to actual social situations. In a later chapter, Wollstonecraft shifts to the concrete social manifestations of Eve's subordination, such as those in domestic settings. She applies precisely the same analogy from the same Miltonian nexus of images, but at this point in the text it serves to make an argument against the economic dangers that wives must face if they live by the 'reflected light' of their husband and protector, no matter how benevolent:

[S]upposing a woman, trained up to obedience, be married to a sensible man, who directs her judgement without making her feel the servility of her subjection, to act with as much propriety by this reflected light as can be expected when reason is taken at secondhand, yet she cannot ensure the life of her protector; he may die and leave her with a large family. (*VRW* 3.117)

This comment opens a section of Chapter 3 in which Wollstonecraft describes the limited options available to widows. She dramatises this by inserting her fictionalised moral tale of a pitiful 'victim of discontent' thrown into the world. Wollstonecraft claims this is not 'an overcharged picture' but 'a very possible case' (3.118), referring to social, financial, educative, and legal forms of mediation.<sup>66</sup>

In accordance with Wollstonecraft's theory of the social influence of literature, Milton's description of Eve contributes to the social subordination of women. From the point of view of a Pricean political theology, appropriated by Wollstonecraft, women's subordinate social standing is both impious and politically unjust. In order to arrive at this conclusion, Wollstonecraft conducts her critique of Milton and the writers who 'follow' him in different generic languages, shifting from literary to social commentary. Wollstonecraft's expression of the question of female identity in a number of different genres argues against the notion that Wollstonecraft operates strictly within a role imagined by Milton, as Gilbert claims.

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<sup>66</sup> In 'Women's status as legal and civic subjects', Gillian Skinner describes the legal status of women in late eighteenth-century England: Women could not make financial contracts, had no political franchise, and were legally 'non-existent' (91-3). See my Chapter 3 for a further discussion.

Mary Poovey, writing after Gilbert, also insists that Milton intimidated Wollstonecraft. She characterizes her critique as indirect and halting. Poovey cites the textual features of *Rights of Woman* to support this assertion, in particular Wollstonecraft's use of allusion, quotation and typographical emphasis:

It is significant that Wollstonecraft cannot attack Milton directly. Of all the cultural "authorities" she engages, Milton is clearly the most imposing, not only because of his pre-eminence in the English literary political, and religious traditions but because of the special veneration accorded to Milton by Johnson's London circle. The fact that she can record her outrage against Milton only by allusions and by italicizing words in a quoted text [...] suggests the extent to which she is still reluctant to take her aggression to its logical extreme. (73)

Poovey is even more certain than Gilbert that Milton is terrifying to women writers and that Wollstonecraft is no exception. Poovey's assertion is based on Wollstonecraft's use of direct quotation from the poem and assumes that techniques such as allusion and quotation are a sign of weakness. Poovey's reference to Wollstonecraft's personal sense of intimidation and stifled 'outrage' is part of Poovey's larger thesis that an ideology of feminine propriety manifested stylistically in the writing of women writers. In *The Proper Lady*, she examines Mary Shelley, Jane Austen and Mary Wollstonecraft. Poovey's point is that an inescapable ideology of the feminine character, defined largely by ideals of modesty and domesticity, made its presence felt in the personal lives of women, and reflects in their writings. For Poovey, the ideology of 'the proper lady' operated through a set of powerful norms in literary culture that reflected and enforced the broader social restrictions.<sup>67</sup> These norms governed the way in which women wrote and read in the literary sphere of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Thus, 'woman authors' often 'succumb to expectations' that governed the publication of their works and the authorial personae that women could assume (xii). In Wollstonecraft's case, she is hemmed in by a nexus of attitudes towards Milton: the status of Milton as a literary

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<sup>67</sup> It is tempting to compare Poovey's well-developed modern theory of ideological regulation with Wollstonecraft's metaphors of 'covert' power, and a 'stream of opinion'.



figure, his position as radical forebear, and her own self-consciousness as a female writer working in a genre usually occupied by men, the political polemic.<sup>68</sup>

Poovey describes Wollstonecraft's reluctance to follow the 'logical' trajectory of her anger. The suggestion here is that Wollstonecraft, progressing from one *Vindication* to the next, slowly became aware that her inner emotional stresses derived from social phenomena, thus encouraging her to look to other subjects of ideology:

In discovering that her most natural allies in the debate conducted in *Rights of Men* were women (and not, as that work suggested, either liberal bourgeois males or the poor), Wollstonecraft was more nearly able to come to terms with the emotionalism that disrupted that argument; in learning to harness her emotion and by recognizing its fellow in the emotionalism of other women, she seems to have begun to perceive that the problem that had always undermined her self-confidence was collective rather than personal. (69)

Poovey argues that in *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft begins to conceive of women collectively and, after some ambiguity in *Rights of Men*, declares herself to be a member of a group that could potentially claim political power. Wollstonecraft's frequent use of phrases such as 'my sex' and the use of pronouns in her opening comment against Milton indicates that she sees him speaking to women as a collective body, and sees herself as addressed by his text as well: 'he tells us that women are formed for softness'; 'he meant to deprive us of souls' (cf. 106). These statements would apparently be interpreted by Poovey to be evidence of Wollstonecraft's feelings of subjection before the 'imposing' Milton (73).

However, even these brief quotations show a refusal to abandon the critical distance of a generic observer, who is *both* a woman and notes how 'women' as readers are engaged by Milton's text. Wollstonecraft's argument also gains power by her ability to temporarily segregate herself, that is, to invoke a critical distance by alternating narrative positions. In *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft does in fact conflate the 'emotionalism' of women in general with the 'emotion' that individual women feel. However, her shifts between self-inclusion and separation from 'women' as a group allows her to thematise the emotion of women readers, and

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<sup>68</sup> For another critical response to Poovey's psychological criticism, see Gary Kelly, *Revolutionary Feminism*. He states that Poovey traces the 'apparent defects' of *Rights of Woman* to 'defects or contradictions in Wollstonecraft herself or the ideology that structured her consciousness' (138).

leads to an analysis of the texts which provoke those emotions in quite deliberate ways. Poovey does not consider the possibility that 'emotionalism' in *Rights of Woman* serves a strategic function, regardless of whether the author felt a directly corresponding 'emotion'.

## 2.5 Quotation in Wollstonecraft's Critical Practice

Mary Poovey claims that the use of quotation in Wollstonecraft's critique of Milton is a sign of intimidation. On the contrary, quotation and commentary was such a ubiquitous feature of literary commentary in Wollstonecraft's time that it cannot be considered in and of itself a symptom of the emotional state of a female author. The practice of including large portions of text in a review had become a standard feature of literary commentary of the eighteenth century. *The Gentleman's Magazine* had started in 1731 as a digest of other periodicals and included large portions of text, quoted verbatim apparently to offer the reader a bargain. The motto proclaims 'More in Quantity and greater Variety than any Book of the Kind and Price'. The announcement in the first issue declares certain 'gentlemen' intend

to treasure up, as in a Magazine, the more remarkable Pieces on the Subjects abovemention'd, or at least impartial Abridgments thereof, as a Method much better calculated to preserve those Things that are curious, than that of transcribing. (*Gentleman's Magazine* 1:3)<sup>69</sup>

Literary periodicals throughout the century were commonly educative in purpose and combined both functions of both digest and critical journal. As Marilyn Butler explains:

The first requirement was a lucid and careful account of a book's contents, aimed at a reader with little or no prior knowledge of the field; indeed, the nature and the value of the field might itself become the matter the reviewer set out to investigate. ('Medium' 127)

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<sup>69</sup> This particular issue offers short synopses on articles from a list of contemporary publications, the number of which reflects the affinities between periodicals and anthologies: *The Craftsman*, *The Weekly Register*, *The Universal Spectator*, *The Free Briton*, *Applebee's*, *Read's Journal*, *The Traveller*, *The Daily Courant*, *The Daily Post-Boy*, *The Templer*, *Grubstreet Journal*, *Fog's Journal*, *London Journal*, and *The Edinburgh Evening Courant*.

The *Analytical Review*, the periodical for which Wollstonecraft wrote, combined the function of a digest with that of an organ of social and moral commentary. In the 'Prospectus' that prefaced the first issue, the editors (Thomas Christie and Joseph Johnson) declare that they are attempting to revive a lost ideal of literary reviewing. They cite exemplary critics of a better age who, 'while they gave their own opinions of books, did not lose sight of the necessity of enabling their readers to judge for themselves, by such accounts and extracts, as were sufficient for that purpose' (*Prospectus* i). This nostalgic preference for a golden age of disinterested critical practice reflects what Klancher has described as the fragmentation of print culture at the time, and is at the same time somewhat disingenuous, considering Joseph Johnson's central role in what was a highly polarised political atmosphere. The greater 'analytical cast' (ii) of this periodical, evident in its practices of close reading, aims, in fact, at the political education of the reading audience. Klancher's central thesis in his study, *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, marks the shift from a more homogenous reading public to the formation of audiences made distinct by their political and class affiliations:

Eighteenth-century journals had organized English audiences by forming the "reading habit," but after 1790 that habit became the scene of a cultural struggle demanding a new mental map of the complex public and its textual desires, a new way to organize audiences according to their ideological dispositions, their social distances, and the paradoxically intense pressure of their proximity as audiences. (20)

This 'proximity' could take the form of fierce competition, as we observed in the clear identification of partisan interests in the polemic over Milton's poetry.

The *Analytical* kept its promise of criticising less and quoting more. As Derek Roper demonstrates, the proportion of criticism to quoted or summarized text in the main literary periodicals of the time was as follows: 'in the *Critical* and *Analytical* it is 1:4, in the *English* 1:3, in the *British Critic* 3:8, and in the *Monthly* nearly 1:1' (43). Roper's complaint is that there was not enough critical material in literary reviews as a rule, as there was a prevailing 'conservative interpretation' of their function (41). He also delivers a value judgment, seeing the *Analytical* as relatively lacking in the 'opinion' and 'imagination' that would be found in the *Edinburgh*

*Review*. I would argue, however, that the proportion of commentary to quoted text is not necessarily a reflection of an editorial practice of discouraging ‘imagination’. The proportions of quoted text to commentary varied with the political orientation of the reviewer, as well as the commercial interests of the publisher of the periodical. A longer, uninterrupted excerpt with a short prefacing comment by the reviewer was most likely a digest entry in the manner of *The Gentleman’s Magazine* and other miscellany periodicals. It could also be a ‘puff’, that is, a review that encouraged the reader to purchase a particular text. Marilyn Butler points out, however, that all reviews were in a sense puffery for the literary market:

Just as all modern advertising stimulates the public’s appetite both to acquire things and to win the prestige that comes from acquiring the right things, so the journal works most effectively at a level on which the interests of the booksellers are not visibly involved’ (‘Medium’ 123).

Accordingly, the prospectus of the *Analytical Review* strenuously dissociates itself from shady economic practices, as well as partisan motives:

Mysterious transactions have taken place between Authors or Booksellers and Reviewers, and the respectable part of the public, suspecting that there was more of this dishonourable business done than really was the case, have lost their confidence in such Critics; and thus the character and reputation of the journals have been injured and degraded.

[...]

It has been insinuated that the *Analytical Review* originated from a *party*, and is meant to serve their purposes. We give ourselves little trouble about such reports. The public will soon judge from the execution of our work, whether we are sincere or not in our professions of impartiality, and to them we appeal. (‘Prospectus’ i-iii)

Of course, *The Analytical Review* was both partisan and published to make a profit, and perhaps the ‘visibility of the bookseller’, to use Butler’s phrase, explains the protestations of disinterestedness.

Thus, in the 1790s, reviewing was clearly ‘interested’, and partisanship could reflect in quite specific textual practices. Material that was quoted in bits, or quoted with italics, especially when it was not indented was usually in the context of a

negative criticism or a more didactic review, in which the reviewer was developing a partisan position. An illustration of this is the review of *Rights of Woman* by the *Critical Review*, which begins, according to the ideals of criticism mentioned above, with a general summary of the text. The reviewer states that Wollstonecraft's general plan is to extend to women the rights of men. At this point fairly lengthy quotations from *Rights of Woman* are inserted without comment. When the review turns to its rebuttal, which takes up 80% of the piece, this reflects in both the register of language and in the visual aspect:

The pathetic address *ad hominem*,<sup>70</sup> on the injustice and cruelty of subjugating women, is interesting and well expressed. It is true, that women cannot "by *force* be confined to domestic concerns:" it is equally true, that "they will neglect private duties, to disturb, by cunning tricks, the orderly plans of reason;" and sometimes, we may add, even for worse purposes. We agree too, that no coercion should be established "in society, and *the common law of gravity prevailing, the sexes will fall into their proper place:*" nor shall we object to another passage, that "if women are not permitted to enjoy *legitimate rights*, they will render both men and themselves vicious to obtain *illicit privileges.*" But to be serious.

We should despise ourselves, if we were capable to garble sentences, in order to make them bear a different or a double meaning. The meaning of miss Wollstonecraft must be obvious, and we have only marked the equivocal nature of her language by *Italics*. If the whole was not as defective in reasoning as in propriety, we should not for a moment have indulged a smile. (qtd. in Macdonald and Scherf 434-5; *Critical Review* 4 [1792])

The reviewer facetiously endorses Wollstonecraft's 'interesting and well-expressed' principles, and notes her 'ad hominem' attacks, only to turn to his own quite personal invective; of course, the review proceeds to dismiss *Rights of Woman* as poorly argued as well as illicit. There are typographical interventions of the type we have seen Wollstonecraft utilise in her critique of Milton. As we have seen in Wollstonecraft's critique of Milton, this reviewer uses the italicised portions of his antagonist's writing as evidence of her self-indictment through contradiction. He goes on to argue that Wollstonecraft's assertions here are correct, but that she is

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<sup>70</sup> [What follows is the footnote in the *Critical*]: As we write this article professedly for the service of the lady, we ought to apologise for the Latin word: It may be englished "*personal* address;" – but "hominem" is a word, in this instance, peculiarly happy, for it means man or woman – either exclusively man, or those *manly females* who endeavour to imitate men.



mistaken in believing that 'legitimate rights' mean the levelling of the social roles of the sexes. It is precisely these 'equivocal' points that will occupy the rest of the review, which becomes, in essence, a re-affirmation of the traditional rights' and 'privileges' of the sexes along more traditional lines than Wollstonecraft.

Another case that illustrates the use of quotation and the extensive intervention of the reviewer is Wollstonecraft's review, in the *Analytical Review* (309-22) of Catharine Macaulay's *Letters on Education*. Because this is a positive and lengthy review, it is a good illustration of Wollstonecraft's use of quotation. I want to emphasize here, in response to Poovey and to Gilbert, that the textual features of her interaction with Milton are already part of Wollstonecraft's literary critical methodology. In this section, I also examine in detail the content of Wollstonecraft's engagement with Macaulay's religious ideas. This serves as an important parallel to her critique of Milton, in which the religious argument is fundamental to her claims for women's identity and their social standing. In *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft characterises Milton's condescending definition of Eve as an effective demotion of women to the status of 'gentle, domestic brutes!' (*VRW* 2.89). In the review of Macaulay in the *Analytical Review*, Wollstonecraft challenges her theological/philosophical account of the self and faults her tendency to downplay the intellectual agency of individuals. Wollstonecraft insists on clarifying her position vis-à-vis Macaulay, as she does with Milton, not to pursue an abstract theological debate, but to draw political implications from theological principles.<sup>71</sup>

Macaulay's *Letters on Education* is a conduct book set in the mode of Socratic dialogue between the narrator and the student Hortensia. The educator lectures throughout and there is no extended dialogue between teacher and student. However, Macaulay allows questions on the part of Hortensia, which preserves formally the ideal of interaction between teacher and student. At the start of the *Letters*, the reader enters upon an ongoing conversation: 'So you approve, Hortensia, of what I have advanced in favour of the future existence of brute animals' (1). There are also

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<sup>71</sup> Macaulay utilises theological principles in the service of a political critique when she attacks Burke's *Reflections* in *Observations on the Reflections of the Rt. Hon. Edmund Burke, on the Revolution in France* (1790). There Macaulay's use of religious concepts bears similarities to another aspect of Price's rhetoric in *Discourse on the Love of Our Country* – the characterization of the French Revolution as a millennial event: 'The events of human life, when properly considered, are but a series of benevolent providences' (20).

passages in which Hortensia challenges her teacher, although the reader receives this in the form of hearsay:

But I think I hear you say, “Whither are you going so fast; you have indeed said a good many things very well. But what have you done more than throw a few illustrations on a position, which I have acknowledged in the very letter to which this is an answer. [...]” (7)

This passage is in the context of a discussion on moral accountability. The text is in epistolary form, but the appearance of quotations and challenging language is unusual in this genre, especially when the discussants are both women. Most conduct books of this time were addressed to generic young ladies, and the ‘letters’ are actually lectures that rarely account for any disagreement in the student. The personification of the young woman and the suggestion of an interactive setting grant a greater level of autonomy to the young woman.<sup>72</sup>

Macaulay begins with a series of reflections on religion, which was typical of the organization of conduct books. Proportionally, only 9 of the 56 ‘letters’ have to do with the proper behaviour of young women, with most of the text concerned with theological points, epistemology, moral philosophy, politics and classical history. Macaulay explains the use of religious material in her text, claiming that her purpose is to engage in the discussion not for sectarian purposes but because religious ideas have a strong influence on the formation of her student. Macaulay delivers her lecture in third person:

She is aware that the introducing sensible impressions in divine worship, with a view to induce religious sentiment, and raise the mind to the contemplation of the Deity, has been productive of the greatest abuses in religion. But let it be remembered, that in a speculative theory of education, in which those principles are to be considered which have an uniform tendency to sublime, refine, and soften the mind; the influence of such impressions could not be passed over. (*Letters on Education* iv-v)

The view of religion as a form of ‘impression’ rather than revealed faith is evidence of the intellectual approach of the *Letters*, and reflects, perhaps, the influence of

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<sup>72</sup> In Chapter 3 of this thesis, I discuss how interactions between teacher and student, especially the female student, are represented in advice literature.

latitudinarianism on Macaulay's Anglicanism. Wollstonecraft pursues the discussion in similar terms, with an awareness of the social instrumentality of religion.

Wollstonecraft patterns her review, which goes on for 21 pages in the original, by placing Macaulay's subtitles in the order they appear in the original. These include:

The question of public and private education; Literary education of young persons; No characteristic difference in sex; Influence of impressions; Politeness, Fashion, Sobriety, and Personal Beauty; The duty of governments towards producing a general civilization; On the Origin of Evil. (*AnRev* 309 et passim)

Although Wollstonecraft begins the review by complimenting this 'fervid writer', this review is not a 'puff'. Wollstonecraft frequently disagrees with Macaulay; the review of Macaulay's *Letters* is an opportunity for Wollstonecraft to expound her views on education. Speaking of the education of young boys, Wollstonecraft asks: 'Do you wish him soon to become acquainted with the vices and weaknesses of human nature, and learn adroitly to turn them to his own advantage [?] – send him to a public school' (7.313). An evaluation of public and private education appears in Chapters 5 and 12 of *Rights of Woman*, where Wollstonecraft critiques the educational plans of Chesterfield and Rousseau respectively.

At another point in the review, Wollstonecraft discusses Macaulay's subtitles. One of the chapters in the book, 'Example should coincide with instruction', gives the commonplace advice that parents ought to be exemplary models of moral behaviour. Wollstonecraft responds: 'True, O moralist! – But then thou shouldst educate two generations' (7.313). The suggestion of educating adults is in line with the spirit of Macaulay's text, which, broaching subjects that would be familiar to sophisticated readers, is a medium by which Macaulay indirectly addresses and educates adult readers while preserving the format of a book aimed at the young female tutee.

The most significant of Wollstonecraft's procedures in this review is her use of lengthy quotations, usually between 200-600 words, using passages quoted from the *Letters* as an opportunity to present her own views at length. This is the case in the section on 'the origin of evil', concerning Macaulay's opinions on theodicy. Wollstonecraft's disagreement with Macaulay on an apparently obscure theological

point prefigures her deployment of particular forms of theodicy in *Rights of Woman*. Theodicy was generally associated with conservatism earlier in the century.<sup>73</sup> The activist interpretation of theodicy is important for radicals such as Wollstonecraft, who emphasise the imperative to act against apparent evil, one possible interpretation of the following:

Firmly persuaded that no evil exists in the world that God did not design to take place, I build my belief on the perfection of God.

Rousseau exerts himself to prove that all *was* right originally: a crowd of authors that all *is* now right: and I, that all will *be* right. (*VRW* 1.84)

The appearance of an apparently more quietist theodicy in Burke's *Reflections* to justify poverty demonstrates the distinction between its conservative and radical uses and is evidence of its literary currency.<sup>74</sup> Thus, it is not difficult to appreciate the attention to this topic in the *Analytical Review*; Wollstonecraft's review happens also to be published in the same month as Burke's *Reflections*. She quotes Macaulay's thoughts on the issue:

The modern philosopher [...] asserts, that there is an abstract fitness of things perceived by the mind of God, and so interwoven in the nature of contemplative objects, as to be traced, like abstract truths, by those faculties of the mind, which enable us to compare and perceive the agreement and disagreement of our sensitive and reflex ideas. (*AnRev* .318, Macaulay 342)

'The modern philosopher' refers to Macaulay, in the role of teacher, and the 'abstract fitness of things' refers to an eternal set of moral truths that only await discovery. Evidencing a neoPlatonic approach, Macaulay posits the existence of an ideal good,

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<sup>73</sup> In Pope's *Essay on Man* it seems to be an apology for the status quo, epitomized in the frequently quoted dictum that 'whatever is, is right' (1.94), or even the more politically quietist statement, 'For Forms of Government let fools contest; / Whate'er is best administer'd is best' (1.294; 3.303-4). Leibniz characterizes complaints about one's place in society as 'murmuring against the orders of providence', and states clearly that political polemic is not part of his system: 'One must not readily be among the malcontents in the State where one is' (131).

<sup>74</sup> Burke's comment is not strictly theodical in as much as it does not directly declare that poverty is an evil allowed by God in order to lead to eventual good. But the following statement implies that the state of poverty is acceptable to God: 'they [the poor] must labour to obtain what by labour can be obtained; and when they find, as they commonly do, the success disproportioned to the endeavour, they must be taught their consolation in the final proportions of eternal justice' (qtd. in *Rights of Men* 55).

and sees human intellect as being able to discover but not invent morals. Wollstonecraft is in agreement on this point, as she repeats Macaulay's phrase, 'the abstract fitness of things' on the following page.<sup>75</sup> But it is on the question of whether the attribute of divine power displaces divine wisdom that Wollstonecraft critiques Macaulay: 'Some of the difficulties respecting the origin of evil perhaps arise from a blind kind of respect to the power of God – It has been thought disrespectful even to limit his power by supposing it dependent on, or directed, by his wisdom' (7.318). The idea is that Macaulay is too 'eager to defend revelation' and does not emphasise, to Wollstonecraft's satisfaction, the rational aspect of God.

Wollstonecraft's 'rational theodicy', according to Daniel Robinson, is instrumental to her arguments in *Rights of Woman* (189). Wollstonecraft writes that worship ought always to be compatible with rational understanding:

His omnipotence is made to swallow up, or preside over His other attributes, and those mortals are supposed to limit His power irreverently, who think that it must be regulated by His wisdom. [...] The High and Lofty One, who inhabiteth eternity, doubtless possesses many attributes of which we can form no conception; but Reason tells me that they cannot clash with those I adore – and I am compelled to listen to her voice. (*VRW* 3.115)

For Wollstonecraft, reason is a divine attribute and allows the individual to discover moral truths. Her belief in this process of rational discovery, which is itself divinely sanctioned, is instrumental to her feminist argument and her rejection of Milton's account of Eve. The value of this position is that it allows her the ability to criticize definitions of woman that are said to be God's 'design'.

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<sup>75</sup> This is in line with Price's moral theory, which says that there are immutable truths, awaiting discovery by the actions of reason and intuition, but not by unassisted faith, or pure sentiment. Price's system allows for the integration of reason and intuition in the question of how we come to perceive moral good. What he expressly rejects, in responding to Hutcheson, is the idea that morals can be perceived through an independent faculty that is completely unassisted by any rational effort:

That no one can judge one end to be better than another, or believe a real moral difference between actions; without giving his assent to an impossibility; without mistaking the *affections of his own mind* for truth, and *sensation* for knowledge. (*Price Review* 49)

This is part of an extended debate over epistemology and morals, but can be summarized as follows. For Price, reason is involved, but not always necessary, in the actual perception of moral good, but for Hutcheson, reason comes into play only in retrospect or as a very weak substitute for the 'moral sense'; he claims that once the good is known, through the operations of the 'moral sense', which makes a 'natural and immediate determination' (Hutcheson 'Sense' 275), reason will corroborate this knowledge. Hutcheson declares that reason can only 'corroborate our *moral faculty*' (280).



Wollstonecraft's critique of Macaulay's *Letters* is a balanced presentation of Macaulay's text, and is thus generally 'analytical' in the ideal terms of the 'Prospectus'. However, Wollstonecraft also takes the opportunity to promulgate her own agendas. The thorough engagement with Macaulay's ideas on education and theology in particular anticipate Wollstonecraft's treatment of Rousseau and Milton in *Rights of Woman*. Wollstonecraft deals with a writer of recognized stature among her own political allies. Macaulay is the only writer whom she praises without reservation in *Rights of Woman* (5.175). Contrary to Poovey's assumption that the use of quotations is somehow a form of deference, the confidence that this review displays in its vigorous engagement with a strong writer can in no way be interpreted as deferential or marked by feelings of intimidation. The persona that emerges in this review is clearly the moral critic who uses the tools of literary analysis to make her arguments and not a writer who is overawed by a more powerful author. Gilbert has claimed that in *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft fills a role from within Milton's primal epic universe, but a comparison of this review with the critique of Milton suggests an extant methodology that has less to do with the personae of *Paradise Lost* and more to do with contemporary practices of politicized periodical writing. It is speculative to assume that once Wollstonecraft confronts Milton, her role suddenly shifts to one that has been established by the poet instead of continuing in a role which offers more autonomy, that of the literary critic.

## 2.6 Conclusion

In terms of the sequence of Wollstonecraft's argument in *Rights of Woman*, Milton's poetry is the first concrete illustration of a 'male' literary tradition of prescriptive definitions of woman. As the title of Chapter 2 declares, the focus is upon 'prevailing opinion'. This phrase recurs often throughout the text and refers to another, darker, view of the historical growth of ideas, parallel to a triumphant Enlightenment paradigm of expanding knowledge, a discursive phenomenon that oppresses women by defining them. This tradition is termed a 'tendency' that is present in different genres and at different levels of literary accomplishment (*VRW* Intro.73). From Milton the discussion immediately turns to Rousseau, because it is

precisely his delineation of the public and private spheres and the role of women's speech within those spheres that Wollstonecraft seeks to reform by her criticism. The critique of Milton, though relatively brief in comparison with the critique of Rousseau, establishes the terms and procedures by which Wollstonecraft proceeds against Rousseau.

## Chapter 3

### Wollstonecraft's Critique of Rousseau in Chapter Three of *Rights of Woman*: Managing *Emile*

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#### 1.0 Introduction

The critique of Rousseau in *Rights of Woman* focuses upon how *Emile* defines proscribed social roles for women. Wollstonecraft's choice of *Emile* as a target for criticism reveals not so much her bitter disillusionment with a former hero, as has been suggested, but an engagement with Rousseau as a representative and disseminator of a damaging ideology.<sup>76</sup> Catharine Macaulay's identification of Rousseau as the most obvious representative of a repressive ideology regarding women, in *Letters on Education* (205), is a launching point for Wollstonecraft's much more extensive critique. Wollstonecraft considers *Emile* a particularly influential text whose ideal of the modest, retiring, domestically-bound woman has become the dominant 'sexual character' supported by 'public opinion', that is, a normative ideal of gender.

While the biographical approach to Wollstonecraft's engagement with Rousseau is unsatisfactory, it is also insufficient to see the two writers purely in terms of their respective social programs. Some modern assessments of *Rights of Woman* treat Wollstonecraft's response to Rousseau primarily as a doctrinal counterstatement, and not as literary or cultural critique. These studies have remained focused exclusively on Wollstonecraft's own ontology of woman, often concluding that, like Rousseau, Wollstonecraft adheres to an essentialist doctrine, and that therefore her critique is self-defeating or complicit. For example, Joan Landes states that Wollstonecraft, and

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<sup>76</sup> Janet Todd suggests that Wollstonecraft's engagement with Rousseau throughout her writings displays a tension between her emotional reactions to his writing and her intellectual and political objections. Frequently quoted to support this view is Wollstonecraft's letter to her lover Gilbert Imlay, in which she confesses she had been 'half in love' with Rousseau (Todd *Revolutionary* 102). This approach comes close to seeing Wollstonecraft's critique in simplistic gendered terms. William Frend and Thomas Paine also confessed personal admiration of the beauty of Rousseau's writing while rejecting fundamental elements of his thought (Frend to Mary Hays 16 April, 1762; *Rights of Man* 94)

other 'feminists' of her time, 'adopted many of the contradictory assertions of the republican movement, as between an ideology of rights and a commitment to nature in which women are to be assigned a subordinate place' (*Women* 123). I would like to challenge this approach in two ways. First, Wollstonecraft's concept of what is 'natural' to women is so distinct from Rousseau's model that it cannot be said to imply 'subordinate roles' for women. Wollstonecraft's theory of human identity is not drawn from Rousseau's conjectural history, but from the concept of the sexless soul and other aspects of the religious rhetoric discussed in the previous chapter. Second, the primary activity of *Rights of Woman* is not a detailed presentation of Wollstonecraft's gender doctrine, but a critique of Rousseau's gender doctrine. Wollstonecraft's critique must be understood as a specific critical reaction in a real political context, and she engages with *Emile* precisely because of the manner in which it influences her contemporaries. It is for this reason that she does not translate any of the work from the French, something that she was capable of doing, but takes all her quotations from the most popular edition of *Emile* in Britain, William Kenrick's 1762 translation, which was still being reprinted at the end of the century. Wollstonecraft practices a two-pronged analysis: first, she focuses upon Rousseau's philosophical rhetoric of essences, and then upon the literary expression of his doctrine in the form of different literary genres that appear in *Emile*. This reflects both the necessary rationalist engagement with the philosophical content, itself a form of rhetoric, and the politically self-aware critique that was most likely to appeal to an erudite readership.

Joan Landes comments that 'Wollstonecraft finds it difficult to deny the central presumption of her age, that women posses natures different from men's' (*Women* 130). However, *Rights of Woman* does not simply present another competing version of womanhood, but ultimately leaves open the question of a clearly defined female 'character' in order to concentrate on those portions of the character that are inculcated by education and literature: 'But should it be proved that woman is naturally weaker than man, whence does it follow that it is natural for her to labour to become weaker than nature intended her to be?' (*VRW* 3.110). Landes might interpret this statement as illustrating Wollstonecraft's 'difficulty' with an unequivocal rejection of a doctrine of innate difference. Barbara Taylor sees her deferral as strategic:

Wollstonecraft insists on agnosticism, on the grounds that as long as women are 'treated as subordinate beings, and not as part of the human species' it is impossible to know their natural condition: a stance that places her firmly outside the old *querelle des femmes*, with its stylized disputes over sex superiority, and takes her instead into an extended analysis of the psychological and cultural pressures that de-nature female children. (*Imagination* 87)

Taylor's use of the term '*querelle*' refers to the debate within print culture whose roots Hilda Smith has traced back to the pamphlets of the seventeenth century (17). By setting Wollstonecraft's rhetoric in contrast to other historical feminist discourses, Taylor illuminates the various choices open to advocates of reform, and contextualises feminist doctrinal positions within a literary sphere. However, Taylor sees Wollstonecraft's critique as a general, 'cultural' critique, excluding it from one historical literary context, but not considering its place in another, that is, the central social function taken by the periodical reviewer. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Wollstonecraft attributes many of the debilitating features of the constructed 'sexual character' to the mediation of literature, and in this chapter we will see how her role as literary professional is employed to isolate and challenge precisely the way that mediation is accomplished. As we will see below, when Wollstonecraft presents her realist moral tale of a young widow who ends in ruin because of the actual legal and social pressures in contemporary society, this tragedy is directly attributed to her *mother's* reading of *Emile*. In educational literature the term 'mother' is not simply a formulaic form of address but hails a broad readership of parents, tutors, guardians, and others. It is a term which implies a wide and historically continuous readership in most of the texts I consider here. I agree with Taylor that Wollstonecraft's ontological 'agnosticism' is a pragmatic rhetorical strategy, which redirects the reader's attention to the social construction of femininity, but Wollstonecraft focuses upon how that social construction is itself influenced by 'Writers'. Her emphasis on the social influence of literature can be read off in the titles of Chapters 2 and 5.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> An even more direct illustration of the clear connection between literature and cultural beliefs can be read off in the title of Madame De Staël's work, *Literature Considered in Its Relationship to Social Institutions* (1800).



*Rights of Woman* engages with an erudite audience both through direct address and through the density of allusions that imply a shared level of literacy. Parents and others responsible for the upbringing of children appear in *Rights of Woman* as readers of educational manuals, and in particular, of Rousseau's *Emile*. Early in her critique Wollstonecraft calls upon 'the mother who wishes to give true dignity of character to her daughter', and asks her to 'proceed on a plan diametrically opposite to that which Rousseau has recommended with all the deluding charms of eloquence and philosophical sophistry' (*VRW* 3.110), which assumes that childrearing practices already owe much to *Emile*. Wollstonecraft's placement of social behaviours within a critique of literature rather than the other way around was not unusual. In 'On the Origin and Progress of Novel-Writing', the introduction to the 38-volume *The British Novelists* (1810), Anna Laetitia Barbauld states: 'Let me make the novels of a country, and let who will make the systems' ('On Novel Writing' 22). Jon Klancher quotes an anti-Jacobin writer, T.J. Mathias, as granting great political importance to literature: "'Literature, well or ill-conducted, is the great engine by which all civilized States must ultimately be supported or overthrown.'" (qtd. in 'Genre' 152).

Likewise, for Wollstonecraft, it is literature which has had the biggest hand in producing 'cultural pressures' upon women. While Wollstonecraft saw general social behaviours as being to some degree the product of literary activity, this does not mean that she approved of the dominant social role of literature. Her notion of a 'medium of books' imagines a social dimension apart from written language. In one sense, this seems to follow Rousseau's own scepticism concerning the mediation of advice literature in the upbringing of children.<sup>78</sup> But at the same time, the affect of disdain for literature prepares the ground for the authority of the current text, and for all her suspicions of the 'medium of books', Wollstonecraft presents herself as a necessary mediator of literature to readers. Moreover, in the very act of posing their own educational principles intertextually, both Rousseau and Wollstonecraft seek

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<sup>78</sup> In the *First Discourse* Rousseau complains of the proliferation of education manuals. He states it would be better to have only physical education than to be misled by the bad advice therein: 'I would as soon said a Wise man, that my pupil had spent his time on a Tennis Court, at least his body would have been the more fit for it' (II.77).

take an authoritative role within the literary public sphere by superseding their predecessors.<sup>79</sup>

As Eve Tavor Bannet has pointed out, Rousseau's novels were so familiar to readers at the end of the century that allusions to characters and features of his plots were immediately recognisable. In her view, Rousseau's cultural role was to reaffirm a traditional domestic plan: 'the British male establishment's mid-century idyll of paternalistic good order and benevolent domestic government'. Thus, 'Rousseau' becomes a 'topos' in relation to which women writers of the latter half of the eighteenth century establish their own stances regarding domestic arrangements through rewriting the plots of *Julie* and *Emile* (162-4). Bannet's study focuses on women's novels, such as Helen Maria Williams's *Julia* (1790) and Charlotte Smith's *Desmond* (1792), which recast the former, and Wollstonecraft's own *Mary: A Fiction* (1788) and Mary Hays's *The Victim of Prejudice* (1799) which recast the latter. However, *Rights of Woman* is not simply a presentation of yet another domestic plan. The formal features of *Rights of Woman* as criticism and as a miscellany of texts in relationship to each other constitute a metacommentary upon the way Rousseau has influenced a number of readers and writers. In other words, *Rights of Woman* contains a study of *Emile*'s relationship to a literary community that includes intellectual women. Wollstonecraft's earlier reviews of Williams's and Smith's novels in the *Analytical Review* (251-3; 450-2), which discuss their debt to Rousseau, and the frequent mentions of Rousseau's 'followers', both men and women, in *Rights of Woman*, suggest that literary interactions with Rousseau could be thematised. In other words, the audience for Wollstonecraft's critique of Rousseau was already in place, including fellow women writers, and could be made aware of its literary relationship with Rousseau.

Wollstonecraft's interventions challenge a relationship that the periodicals had encouraged between *Emile* and an audience of 'preceptors and parents'. This term evokes a wide readership, including actual parents and tutors, as well as writers and commentators upon education. Jon Klancher has characterised late eighteenth-century radical speech as implicating readers 'in the very texture of the discourse'

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<sup>79</sup> In several places in *Emile* Rousseau is in dialogue with John Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693). Although I do not subscribe to a Bloomian paradigm, in which successive writers feel the oppressive authority of paternal forebears, a prominent theme in *Rights of Woman* is the displacement of *Emile*.

(*Audiences* 28), but the same can be said of eighteenth-century print culture in general. At mid-century, this is precisely what the *Critical Review* is doing in its presentation of *Emile*. The *Critical Review* opens its review/digest of *Emile* with the comment that '[w]hat are defects and failings in men, are essential qualities in women' (15:21). This is not the gallant language of the '*querelle*' and the use of a rationalist language here illustrates that the terms by which educative prescriptions were delivered. Wollstonecraft utilizes the same rationalist language but turns to question the rational integrity of the arguments within *Emile*, and by extension, those of Rousseau's first sponsors in British print culture. Wollstonecraft's rationalist commentary on 'essential qualities' at the start of Chapter 3 of *Rights of Woman* questions the terms by which periodicals mediated *Emile* to an audience of these 'preceptor[s] and parent[s]' (*Critical* 15:34, cf. 160).

Klancher explains that specialised generic languages were crucial to the polemical texts of the later eighteenth and early nineteenth century because a universal language of rationalism could not be relied upon to conjure a broad readership. As Klancher points out, late eighteenth-century polemical texts represent a multiplicity of extant social languages, that is, they display *heteroglossia*, that is, the existence of contemporaneous social languages and dialects as they may be represented in written texts, especially the novel.<sup>80</sup> Klancher further states that 'heteroglot language could not represent "other" social languages without also representing their relationships to *their* readers' (*Audiences* 11). Although Klancher does not mention *Rights of Woman* amongst the radical writings which display these representational mechanisms, his categories are applicable here. Through allusion and quotation, Wollstonecraft incorporates the rational and philosophical arguments of other writers in the texture of *Rights of Woman*, and in so doing competes with these writers on their own terms. When Wollstonecraft critiques Rousseau's *Emile*, she compares its tutorial agency, its deployment of the moralist anecdote, and its scientific discourse with her own formulations. This is a rhetorical mechanism in the service of Wollstonecraft's attempt to wrest authority from Rousseau in a public contest. But Wollstonecraft is

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<sup>80</sup> Klancher appropriates Bakhtin's particular application of the term, but Bakhtin resists seeing this as a function of genres besides the novel (*The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* 1192 et passim; from Bakhtin *Discourse in the Novel*).

also appealing to portions of Rousseau's audience – not only mothers and educators, but Wollstonecraft's fellow educational *writers*. Wollstonecraft attempts to displace Rousseau before an audience of 'mothers', that is, an audience of educators, by first attempting to make visible the unacknowledged, and often unconscious, adherence to Rousseau's doctrine of gender. To this end, Wollstonecraft's juxtapositions of Rousseau's texts with other texts represent the relationship between Rousseau and his audience, to follow Klaner's schema here.

Wollstonecraft's criticism is structured by periodical culture and the closely related genre of the anthology. *Emile* is already highly visible in the periodical culture from which Wollstonecraft draws many of her critical technologies. *Emile* is translated in 1762 by William Kenrick, who then reviews his own translation in the *Critical Review* the following year (15:21-34). All of Wollstonecraft's quotations of *Emile* are taken from the Kenrick edition. James Warner has documented that it was this particular translation which was most widely disseminated until the end of the eighteenth century (777). In *Emile*, Rousseau's own comments on the literariness of *Emile* displays a self-awareness of his novel/treatise's place amongst other texts. Rousseau asserts, in a passage that is both coy and grandiose, that readers may underestimate the seriousness of the text because of its literary genre:

It makes very little difference to me if I have written a romance. A fair romance it is indeed, the romance of human nature. If it is to be found only in this writing, is that my fault? This ought to be the history of my species. You who deprave it, it is you who make a romance of my book. (*Emile* 415-6)

Rousseau insists that readers ought to consider his text a serious study of human nature, but he has also opened his text to critical consideration. Wollstonecraft takes up Rousseau's invitation (provocation) to think about the genre of *Emile*, and discussions about literary genre itself had explicit political overtones in the context of the 1790s.

In her critique of Rousseau, Wollstonecraft employs some of the techniques she has used in her critique of Milton, such as quotation and commentary, as well as typographical interventions. In Chapter 3 of *Rights of Woman*, the primary focus of my study here, Wollstonecraft expands upon these techniques. In effect, this part of the text resembles the contemporary anthology, in the strategies of selection,

arrangement, and presentation of text, which all work in the service of an ideological aim. Thus, Wollstonecraft assumes the role of editor, a role that has special implications. Barbara Benedict has pointed out that as eighteenth-century anthologies assume a greater ideological role in their categorisation of genre, the editor role gains power (236). From the point of view of rhetorical strategy, this role was a way to affect neutrality as a sponsor of the writing of others while employing patterns of selection and presentation that were far from objective. For example, the organisation of texts in the anthology worked to reinforce generic divisions that served cultural agendas.

Like the typical editor of an anthology, Wollstonecraft subordinates her selections to a central didactic purpose, but unlike many of her contemporaries does not represent texts which build an image of consensus amongst writers. Instead, she establishes a contentious field in which a female critic could oppose a long tradition of prescriptive male writing. Wollstonecraft selects and compares lengthy passages from *Emile* with another educational text, Thomas Day's *Sandford and Merton* (1783) and inserts three of her own moral tales, written in a markedly different genre than the running critical commentary. These tales are designed to illustrate the influence of Rousseau's writing not directly upon young female readers, but upon young women's educators, and also upon other writers who produce educational literature. Wollstonecraft's tales function as examples of supposedly better writing than Rousseau's, and at the same time illustrate the dangers of reading his more ephemeral but powerful material. The excerpting and insertion of texts in Chapter 3 places Wollstonecraft's conversation with Rousseau in a contentious literary forum.

This chapter is organized into several sections. In Sections 3.1 and 3.2, I examine Rousseau's basic construction of the ideal woman, and its deployment in the literary public sphere. I argue there that Rousseau is self-consciously in dialogue with contemporary rational feminists, incorporating and dismissing their arguments within his text. In Section 3.3, I examine *Emile*'s first appearance in Britain, and its sponsorship in periodicals. *Emile*'s strategies are easily assimilable into the 'civilising' project of periodical culture, which, as Kathryn Shevelow has pointed out, was not only instrumental in establishing gender roles, but also practiced various methods of 'containing' newly literate women. In Section 3.4 I discuss the manner in which Wollstonecraft uses anthologizing, primarily in Chapter 3 of *Rights of Woman*,



to re-present and place *Emile* in a poor light. I then examine, in Section 3.5, the notion of the autonomous female reader that is encouraged by these practices. The deployment of heterogeneous material in Chapter 3 of *Rights of Woman*, the appropriation of methods of containment such as the aesthetic categorisation of Rousseau's writing and adoptions of various forms of recognised literary authority, all demonstrate a range of literary critical engagement beyond what has commonly been ascribed to *Rights of Woman*.

### 3.1 'Nature' as Rhetoric in *Emile*

For Wollstonecraft, Rousseau's *Emile* has influenced a generation of writers 'who have followed in his footsteps' (*VRW* 2.96) and thus contributes to a pervasive social conception of woman. Her opinion of the centrality of this book is echoed today amongst feminist historians. Susan Moller Okin has argued that we should take Rousseau at his word when he states that this educational treatise in novel form is 'the best and most important of all [his] works' (102). Okin sees *Emile* as the text which provides the best introduction to 'his whole philosophy', and in her view is the foremost exemplar of 'the modern patriarchal tradition' (102).<sup>81</sup> Barbara Taylor also emphasizes the importance of *Emile* for Wollstonecraft. Taylor states that *Emile*

deserve[s] Wollstonecraft's particular attention': not just because of Rousseau's intellectual weight but because, more than any other creation of the eighteenth-century male imagination, the figure of Sophie exemplifies Woman as prescriptive invention, a masculine fantasy of the feminine. (*Imagination* 86)

Taylor sees the prescriptive power of *Emile* working through 'imagination' and 'invention', that is, through its ability to construct an ideal feminine image in fiction, one that is calculated to have an influence on the self-conception of female readers. While Taylor stresses the representation of woman in *Emile*, Okin underlines Rousseau's rhetorical strategy and explicit philosophical arguments. Wollstonecraft

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<sup>81</sup> *Women in Western Political Thought* (1979) surveys male thinkers from classical antiquity to the twentieth century concerning the issue of women's social roles.

does both: she isolates the elements of Rousseau's gender ideology, and demystifies its supposedly seductive narrative form before a specific audience. Linda Kerber has suggested that if 'the *Social Contract* and [Montesquieu's] *Spirit of the Laws* were in some sense 'men's books', *Emile* and *Julie* [...] were in some sense women's books' (23; qtd in Thomas 196). Wollstonecraft claims that both the argument and the form of *Emile* itself are objects of proper scrutiny for women. In examining Okin's account of Rousseau's place in the history of anti-feminist writing, I want to also confirm Wollstonecraft's place in prefiguring Okin.

Rousseau's image of the ideal woman is embodied in Sophie, whose marriage to Emile is the culmination of his training for manhood. The descriptions of Emile and Sophie reflect the realignment of gender roles in the eighteenth century from the 'hierarchical' family structure to what has been called the 'egalitarian', 'companionate', or complementary model of family. The term 'egalitarian family' is coined in Randolph Trumbach's classic of social history, *The Rise of the Egalitarian Family*. Trumbach's historical thesis is as follows: With the gradual phasing out of strict primogeniture in early eighteenth-century Britain, members of the typical family stood in relatively more equal status to each other. As for adult women outside of families, 'equity' law, as opposed to common law, provided them with opportunities to appeal for financial compensation from their husbands' estates in cases of divorce and widowhood. The term 'companionate marriage' comes from Lawrence Stone's *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800*, where he describes the gradual extinction of arranged marriages in the same period, and the growing cultural ideal of marriage-as-partnership.

Modern feminists have generally been unsatisfied with optimistic accounts of the restructuring of the family, primarily because older forms of gender hierarchy were re-inscribed in the new systems. In the older model, men were to take a superior place over women in social hierarchies, not because they differed from women in *kind*, but in *degree*. Men were essentially the same as women in every respect, that is, physically and intellectually, but simply superior in every respect. The introduction of 'sex' as a descriptor changed the manner in which a dominant male discourse was able to justify, and mask, the effective social ascendancy of men, even as changing family structures seemed to grant women more autonomy. Katherine Binhammer points out, in an instructive parallel with Stone and with Trumbach, that

“Sex” was being redefined in the eighteenth century to designate essential differences between the sexes, and the hierarchical model of sexual difference was replaced by the model of complementarity’ (669). In the newer model, men and women were not represented as unequal, but complementary. Yet, whether sex difference was based on *degree*, as in the older models, or *kind*, as in the complementary model, these are likewise legitimized by seeing these differences as innate. The descriptions of Emile and Sophie are clearly contrasted, and complementary, as Rousseau tells us before embarking on his description of the couple: ‘In the union of the sexes each contributes equally to the common aim, but not in the same way’ (*Emile* 358). Emile is physically strong; he displays a capacity for abstract thought; he is straightforward in his speech, and unaffected and plain in his comportment. Sophie is physically delicate; her thought is strategic, rather than direct, witty, rather than scientific.

Rousseau’s descriptions are elusive, sometimes grounded on declarations of innate qualities, but often posed in the language of pragmatism. He attempts to resolve the potential contradiction between the two by stating that the dictates of nature are simultaneously the most pragmatic. An overview of his description of Sophie will illustrate this rhetorical ambivalence. In the domestic sphere, Sophie’s role is subordinate, but her public role is even more proscribed. Sophie is to remain in the domestic sphere, and her religion is to be determined first by her father, and then by her husband. ‘Due to the very fact that in her conduct woman is enslaved by public opinion, in her belief she is enslaved by authority. Every girl ought to have her mother’s religion, and every woman her husband’s’ (*Emile* 377). Thus, her interactions with public institutions are always meant to be under ‘restraint’ of one form or another, a condition to which girls must become accustomed from the earliest age. Rousseau insists that mothers should not ‘allow for a single instant in their lives that they no longer know any restraint’ (370). In contrast to Emile’s ‘sincerity’ and avoidance of affectation, Sophie is, nevertheless, expected to be a creature of appearance in both the private and public sphere; she is completely excluded from the public sphere, but fully controlled by its ‘restraints’ which work through the mechanism of ‘public opinion’. Sophie is demure in behaviour but especially in speech; her modesty is an ‘instinct’ (359), and when it is encouraged and developed, it has important functions in both the public and domestic spheres. In

private, female modesty provokes male sexual desire through a show of resistance, but modesty also controls female desire, which is apparently boundless and would 'consume' the couple. In public, Sophie's representations of modesty ensure her neighbours that she is completely loyal to Emile, an important fact for establishing the paternity of their children. 'If there is a frightful condition in the world, it is that of an unhappy father [...] who wonders, in embracing his child, whether he is embracing another's, the token of his dishonour, the plunderer of his own children's property' (*Emile* 361). Thus, the economic stability of society rests upon women's chastity and reputation.<sup>82</sup>

The principle of innate sex difference has been termed 'essentialism' in modern feminist commentary.<sup>83</sup> Okin writes that *Emile* is the archetypical expression of this form of argumentation in the modern era:

The most prevalent argument used to justify the perpetuation of a distinct and subordinate sex role for the female is that such a role is natural. Far from being anything imposed on or developed in her by particular social, economic, and cultural institutions, the passive, dependent, chaste, subrational, sensitive, nurturing characteristics of the female have been regarded as bestowed on her, directly and unmistakably, by nature. (106)

There are numerous examples of Rousseau's reliance on 'nature' in order to justify women's subordinate social standing. For example, at the start of Book 5, Rousseau states that man is bestowed with 'reason' and woman with 'modesty', attributes that are implanted by the 'Supreme Being'. There is considerable disagreement over whether Rousseau is making unequivocal declarations of sex difference in *Emile*, as we will see.

Emile's qualities are as much an expression of a positive ideal as they are an indictment of the 'corrupt' and affected sort of manhood that was the target of republican critiques. Okin points out that *Emile* 'constitutes a radical critique of what contemporary civilization and its socialization techniques have done to the natural man' (125). The corollary to this is that individual men are uncorrupted previous to

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<sup>82</sup> In the next chapter I will show how women's role in social stability becomes codified in Talleyrand's 'Report to the National Assembly', which demonstrates another aspect of Rousseau's influence.

<sup>83</sup> This concept is, perhaps, most succinctly defined by Simone De Beauvoir, who declares that 'essence does not precede existence' (qtd. in *NTC* 1405).

the interventions of civilization. The reforming power of education now comes into the picture. Okin quotes a fundamental statement along these lines:

Men are shaped by education as plants are shaped by cultivation. [...] We are born weak, we need strength; we are born lacking everything, we need help; we are born stupid, we need judgment. Everything that we do not have at birth and that we need when adult, is given us by education. (qtd. in Okin 125; *Emile* 38)

Okin takes this to mean that identity for Rousseau is completely malleable, and at least in this place, he seems to endorse the Lockean concept of the blank slate. Okin wants to show that this contradicts his descriptions of the innate characteristics of little girls, descriptions which imply a purely essentialist argument (128). However, in this description of the role of education Rousseau is not willing to allow a complete blank, leaving space for some pre-existent tendencies. The organic metaphor aptly communicates that, like plants, men can be shaped, but their basic nature cannot by the same token be altered. Rousseau writes that the difficulty is to identify the extent of what is natural and what is not. As he writes at the start of Book 5 of *Emile*, in which he will delineate Sophie's character, 'The difficulty of comparing [men and women] comes from the difficulty of determining what in their constitutions is due to sex and what is not' (*Emile* 357). As I will show below in the discussion of little boys' natural rejection of 'restraint', Rousseau exploits the incomplete definition of the 'natural' man to theorise different essential characteristics in men and women, including the desire for freedom.

Okin argues that Rousseau contradicts himself in another way. In the conjectural anthropological history of his *Discourse on Inequality*, Rousseau describes women at an intermediate stage, before the advent of organised societies. In this state, they are fully capable of tending to themselves and their offspring (*Inequality* 137; Okin 109-110), and it is only at a later 'age', when domestic family life becomes a feature of human society, that women are made subordinate within a patriarchal family structure. Okin argues that Rousseau's patriarchal plan is contradictory because he chooses this latter stage of society as the legitimate source of women's social role rather than the stage preceding it, in which women were clearly capable of freedom and autonomy. As Okin explains:



[W]hen Rousseau refers to the natural man and to the natural woman, he has two distinct reference points in mind. Natural man is man of the original state of nature – totally independent of his fellows, devoid of selfishness, equal to anyone else, and imbued with the natural goodness of pity for any suffering fellow creature. Natural woman, however, is woman defined in accordance with her role in the golden age family – dependent, subordinate, and naturally imbued with shame and modesty. (121)

Okin points out that for Rousseau conjectural history allows us to imagine which of the former ‘ages’ seems ideal. He states, in the introductory ‘Exordium’ that: ‘You will look for the age at which you would wish your Species had stopped’ (Okin 109; *Inequality* 133). For Okin, Rousseau’s selection of *different* historical models for men and for women is arbitrary, and evidence of his deliberate attempt to legitimise gender roles through the use of an Enlightenment historical schema.

A series of studies have challenged Okin’s account of the inconsistency in Rousseau’s gender doctrine. Paul Thomas claims that Rousseau’s philosophy does not pose woman as naturally inferior, but clearly announces its intent to inculcate gendered characteristic in the service of his social doctrine. Women, in Rousseau’s system, must subordinate their own freedom to the project of fully preparing men to act morally in society: ‘Women, according to Rousseau, might teach or empower men to transcend their tendencies to self-absorption and to acquire those sentiments of sociability that are essential to political participation and moral being alike’ (203). Penny Weiss also challenges Okin’s account.

For Rousseau can be most clearly understood as saying that the sexes are *not* relevantly differentiated by nature, but that sex differences can and should be created, encouraged, and enforced because of what he considers to be their necessary and beneficial consequences. (83)

While Rousseau is ‘sexist’ because of the subordinate roles he demands of women, he is not essentialist, because women’s social roles are instrumental to the integrity of society. Helena Rosenblatt’s recent work takes a concretely historicist approach. She examines the specific social context of Geneva in the mid-eighteenth century. There, a ‘disgruntled’ bourgeoisie resisted the rule of the patricians of the city. The patrician women affected Parisian manners, such as in their habits of holding public salons, and it was amongst this social group that the idea of a public theatre arises.

Thus, Rousseau's reaction to the public woman, evident in *Emile*, and most specifically, in *The Letter to D'Alembert* (1758), is a rejection of the project for a Genevan theatre, and is deployed in contemporary politics.

Rousseau solves the apparent contradiction between the principles of self-determination for men and subordination for women by introducing the notion of 'indemnity', or compensation; he suggests that the inequalities within his system are only apparent. Women rule quite effectively while seeming to obey, Rousseau contends facetiously, and adds that women are already the real masters: 'The more women want to resemble them, the less women will govern them, and then men will truly be the masters' (*Emile* 363). However, women can rule only as long as they feign obedience, that is, if they take on the gender characteristics which Rousseau prescribes: 'Woman's empire is an empire of gentleness, skill, and obligingness; her orders are her caresses, her threats are her tears. She ought to reign in the home as a minister does in a state – by getting herself commanded to do what she wants to do' (*Emile* 408). Feminists such as Wollstonecraft have not found these arrangements to constitute a 'rule' of women. Wollstonecraft prefigures modern feminist criticism by suggesting that domestic hierarchies of gender have not been eradicated, but redeployed within the purportedly 'companionate' family, just as forms of representation associated with courtly culture are redeployed as the sexualised 'modesty' of Rousseau's bourgeois woman.<sup>84</sup>

It is not merely that Rousseau's doctrine of femininity is in contradiction with his general republican conception of the male citizen, but that he actually uses language associated with courtly culture when he discusses women, as we can see in the reference to the machinations of 'ministers' in a monarchical state. In other words, Wollstonecraft anticipates Okin's argument against Rousseau's choice of *different* historical bases for the respective social characters of men and women. However, whereas Okin looks to the conjectural historical epochs that appear in *Discourse on Inequality*, Wollstonecraft has a much more recent pair of historical epochs in view. In one place, she claims that there was a feminization of culture under Louis XIV (*VRW* 4.128), a depiction of the seventeenth century that was a commonplace of Pricean and Burghian rhetoric, as Landes has abundantly documented in *Women and*

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<sup>84</sup> This aspect of Rousseau's thought has been noted by Elizabeth Wingrove, discussed in the next chapter.

*the Public Sphere*. In another place, Wollstonecraft indicts Rousseau the republican with his own rhetoric: 'The *divine right* of husbands, like the divine right of kings, may, it is to be hoped, in this enlightened age, be contested without danger [...]' (*VRW* 3.110; Wollstonecraft's emphasis). In short, Wollstonecraft contrasts what she sees as a seventeenth-century French discourse of absolutism with an eighteenth-century English discourse of republicanism, and in doing so, anticipates Landes's argument (cf. 21-23).<sup>85</sup>

### 3.2 Allusions to Feminists in *Emile*

The women readers to whom Rousseau appeals are not only the vulnerable young female readers of novels who were the concern of anti-sensibilist moralists; they are the 'mothers' who are responsible for the upbringing of young women: 'It is to you that I address myself, tender and foresighted mother [...]' (*Emile* 37). But there is one more, troubling, figure that appears in Rousseau's text:

The strictness of the relative duties of the two sexes is not and cannot be the same. When woman complains on this score about unjust man-made inequality, she is wrong. This inequality is not a human institution – or, at least, it is the work not of prejudice but of reason. (*Emile* 361)

Rousseau declares that 'relative duties', that is, women's prescribed social roles, are natural, not a 'human institution', and argues this against an imagined 'complaining' feminist writer, whom he hails as 'woman'. This figure is not only hailed through direct address but also through an allusion to the language she has appropriated, that of reason. Rousseau's antagonists here are the 'rational feminists' of the period, to

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<sup>85</sup> Virginia Sapiro has recognised that Wollstonecraft prefigures Landes, arguing that both writers see the domestic and public realms as structured by gender:

[Landes's] argument that sexual and gender-based contracts buttress notions of social and political contract is very persuasive. Her work and, indeed, Wollstonecraft's *before her* emphasized that women were not ignored or excluded from political theory. They were assigned a special and subordinate place on gendered grounds, just as men gained their place in part through their gender. These places were not coincidental or peripheral to the larger theory; they were reasoned and justified within its terms. (293-4; my emphasis)

use a term from Hilda Smith (15-6). Barbara Taylor sees Book 5 of *Emile* in direct contention with actual historical figures, and characterizes this section of the text as a 'conscious counterblast to feminist argumentation' (*Imagination* 77). Taylor cites an earlier phase in Rousseau's writing in which he had extensive interaction with contemporary feminist writings:

Early in his career, Rousseau was employed as secretary to a Mme Dupin who intended to write a book on female equality. Rousseau assisted her by assembling and annotating works on women, many of them written from an egalitarian position. An impressive quantity of such texts were available in mid eighteenth-century France, and it is possible that an early essay by Rousseau on women's role in political life was written under their influence. (*Imagination* 77-78)

Rousseau's evocation of public critical women is evident in other passages. For example,

When women are what they ought to be, they will limit themselves to things within their competence and will always judge well. But since they have established themselves as arbiters of literature, since they have set about judging books and relentlessly producing them, they no longer know everything. (*Emile* 341)

The narrative flow has been interrupted in order to accommodate Rousseau's harangue against public critical women. This passage is one of the many asides to the reader, which in *Emile* usually take the form of lectures or essays. This comment against literary women comes at the end of Book 4, and foreshadows Rousseau's discussion of Sophie's proper public role: 'I shall soon [...] speak of the true talents of this sex, [...] and of the things about which its decisions ought then to be heard' (ibid.). In contrast to the critical and public figure Rousseau evokes in these passages, Sophie occupies a literary vacuum, in which her reading is highly restricted, and she is not expected to utter anything like literary commentary. Rousseau deploys this figure in the literary sphere as a response to feminists who have improperly taken on the role of 'arbiters of literature'.

While in *Emile* the figure of Sophie is a response to contemporary feminism by virtue of her silence, in *Julie*, the ideal woman expresses anti-feminist philosophy on her own, as in this letter from Julie to her lover:

Attack and defence, men's audacity and women's modesty, are not conventions, as the philosophers think, but natural institutions the causes of which can easily be rationally explained, and from which can be derived all other moral distinctions. (*Julie* 104)

Ventriloquising women's speech, as it were, was a commonplace method of communicating anti-feminist messages, as we have seen in *Paradise Lost*, where Eve is assigned the task of stating the properly submissive role of women (*Paradise Lost* 4.634-8). In *Emile*, the 'complaining woman', that is, the contemporary feminist, is not given a voice, and her objections are presented indirectly. Jon Klancher's description of the writer's awareness of competitors, which in his study refers to the radical writers of a later period, is apt here; Rousseau's evocation of 'complaining' feminists and the women of the salons is not only an attempt to marginalize literary women, but also an attempt to co-opt their influence upon their audience. As we will see, Wollstonecraft is capable of engaging in precisely the same sort of representation, and co-optation, of Rousseau's 'relation to his audience', to use Klancher's words.

The phrase 'nature and reason' represents a language of legitimacy common to contemporary *male* discourse. However, the evocation of a discourse of science and rationality in Rousseau's reference to contemporary feminists is distinct from the language of gallantry and 'eloquence' which was often used to address women. Apart from the literary device of an exemplary ideal such as Sophie or representations of anti-feminist rhetoric, such as Julie's speech, the appearance of a rationalist language in itself hails the rationalist feminist, and implicates her in the argument of Book 5 of *Emile*, where her objections are anticipated and managed. In the passage above, Rousseau evokes the contemporary feminist by employing a rationalist argument: 'This inequality is not a human institution – or, at least, it is the work not of prejudice but of reason'. In this passage, it seems that Rousseau allows *either* nature or 'reason' to be the ruling criterion. First he claims that women are wrong to see sex difference as 'man-made, because 'inequality is not a human institution', and this grounds difference in nature. He then adds that inequality between the sexes might also possibly be 'the work' of 'reason', suggesting that sex differences are only socially useful and not necessarily innate. These appear to be



contradictory, but a brief examination of what is intended by the term 'reason' as it occurs in *Emile* will go some way in explicating this passage. It is also important to examine Rousseau's thought in this regard because Wollstonecraft's critique operates in part by questioning Rousseau's version of 'reason'.

In *Emile*, Rousseau presents 'reason' as less of a logical and cogitative function than in other eighteenth-century usages. In Johnson's *Dictionary*, the first definition (of nine) reads as follows:

Reason. The power by which man deduces one proposition from another, or proceeds from premises to consequences; the rational faculty.

Johnson then gives an example of the usage of this term which seems to agree with Rousseau in regards to the *function* of reason. 'Reason is the director of man's will, discovering in action what is good; for the laws of well-doing are the dictates of right reason'.<sup>86</sup> Like Rousseau, Johnson considers the primary function of reason the ability to judge what is morally good. However, while in Johnson's definition, reason is a faculty of deduction and induction, for Rousseau 'reason' is not so much a calculative function as it is a perceptive one:

The use of reason that leads man to the knowledge of his duties is not very complex. The use of reason that leads woman to the knowledge of hers is even simpler. The obedience and the fidelity she owes to her husband and the tenderness and the care she owes to her children are consequences of her position so natural and easily sensed that she cannot without bad faith refuse her consent to the inner sentiment that guides her, nor fail to recognize her duty if her inclinations are still uncorrupted. (*Emile* 382)

Rousseau's use of the term 'inner sentiment' is roughly equivalent with the eighteenth-century doctrine of a 'moral sense'. Generally speaking, the 'moral sense', as it is defined by Francis Hutcheson (275, cf. footnote #75), is an immediate perception of good or evil, a perception that is signalled by a corresponding emotion. In this view, the function of reason is to confirm what the moral sense has already realized. For Rousseau, reason only 'consents' to what is 'easily sensed', and there is no mention of any calculative function. In the case of woman, the 'obedience and

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<sup>86</sup> Quoted from the Anglican theologian Richard Hooker (1554-1600).

fidelity' which are required in a domestic setting are 'natural', and therefore, the only role of reason is to simply 'recognize' this. Returning to the passage above, Rousseau has essentially said that 'inequality' is either immediately understood as natural, or reason will bring us to this conclusion by another route, that of *assent* with nature.

### 3.3 The Sponsorship of *Emile* in British Periodicals

If, as Bannet has argued, Rousseau became a 'topos' for women writers, then periodicals and anthologies were largely responsible for this phenomenon. *Emile* was published in Paris in 1759, in London in 1762, and in Edinburgh in 1763 (Warner 774). Along with the publication of individual editions, Rousseau's works were excerpted without extensive commentary in the periodical and pamphlet press in this period. This was a common editorial practice, especially when the text was 'puffed', that is, reviewed in order to boost sales, or when the text supported the ideological aims of a particular periodical (cf. 61). The *Annual Register* of 1759, published at the time by Edmund Burke, presents 3000 words of Rousseau's *Letter to D'Alembert on the Theatre* with only cursory commentary (479-84). The *Annual Register* of 1782 and of 1783 contain large excerpts from *The Confessions* and *Emile* respectively (25-31; 531-8). Apparently, before his negative association with radicalism, Rousseau's gendered social regime was still fully acceptable at this time, as was his use of the authorial persona who reveals his interiority to the reader without impediment. William Kenrick was the translator of a 1762 edition of *Emile*, the same edition quoted by Wollstonecraft in *Rights of Woman*, and was himself a literary reviewer. Duffy documents that he was one of the 'regular writers' for the *Monthly Review* from 1758-1765 (12).

It has become a historical commonplace that periodicals were responsible for the sponsorship and dissemination of major works at this time. As Jon Klancher has pointed out, periodicals were the 'chief mediator of the republic of letters' ('Genre' 148; cf. 13). For Derek Roper, they formed the 'instalments of a continuous encyclopedia, recording the advance of knowledge in every field of human enterprise' (36). Kathryn Shevelow has illuminated the particular relevance of this for feminist history. She examines the periodical's role in promoting models of

femininity, and in particular, managing the radical potential of literate women. In her important studies on early periodicals such as the *Tatler* and the *Spectator*, Shevelov describes how periodicals were eventually able to contain this potential:

Initially, women appeared in these periodicals as writing subjects, as well as the objects of other writing subjects. Such representations of the woman subject, even if they were not 'authentic' [...], marked a moment of relative textual openness, in which the emergence of women into literary culture had not yet been contained. (*Print Culture* 24)

Shevelov demonstrates that the emerging model of complementarity which informed the reconstruction of domestic roles was supported by a 'persistent' argument that men and women differed 'in kind rather than degree' (3, 11). Debates over the essential nature of woman were preparatory to the more specific and powerful ways in which the periodical codified figures of ideal female readers and ideal female writers. Because of the interactive nature of the early periodical, women readers were exposed to constant reiterations of essentialist doctrine and ideals of behaviour, in forms of direct address and in narrative representations (29-31; 43-4). Shevelov notes several ways in which the gradual 'containment' of women took place in this period (24). For one thing, the 'same agents' who invited women to participate in the sphere of literary interaction also worked to contain them, and here Shevelov has in mind Addison and Steele's publications (1; cf. 75-77). We have seen in Chapter 1 how this was accomplished through the construction of a 'Lady's' reading curriculum. Then, with the imposition of models of proper female literacy, the political potential of women intellectuals was stifled.

Thus, Rousseau's British sponsors present *Emile* to English-speaking audiences in terms that are part of an ongoing consolidation of dominant models of femininity, and are themselves engaged in containing the 'rational feminist' of the late seventeenth century. As seen in Addison, the early periodical does not depend upon gallant language to address women, but engages them in rationalistic discussions of 'philosophy'. Thus, phrases such as 'reason' and 'nature' which we have seen utilised in a specific manner in *Emile* are adopted in the reviews as part of a performative language which simultaneously described and prescribed gendered identities. It is here that Shevelov is important in elucidating how the early eighteenth-century periodical contains

echoes of conduct writing, particularly the “paternal advice” books of the previous century, are pronounced. The invocation of a powerful literary tradition that was aimed at shaping behavior exerts a rhetorical effect based not only on the conduct books’ didactic content but also on readers’ internalization of the terms of that content: the authority of the paternal voice. (Shevelov ‘Fathers’ 109)

Considering that periodical writing was generally taken to be a ‘male’ genre, Wollstonecraft’s claim that ‘all’ male writers have conspired to ‘render’ women weak is not hyperbole but elucidates for her readers the broad literary tradition of which her antagonists are a part (*VRW* 2.91).

Thomas and Weiss both argue that Rousseau’s descriptions of woman’s ‘nature’ cannot be considered a contradiction to his claims elsewhere of open-ended potential for both sexes, but must be seen as consistent with his political theory as a whole. In this view, sex difference for Rousseau is instrumental rather than literally ordained by either God or Nature. As scholars of political theory, both Thomas and Weiss’s interest is primarily in elucidating Rousseau’s position for a modern audience and not how he was received by the historical reader. He recognizes that Wollstonecraft was ‘quick to see the connection between Rousseau’s sexual politics and other aspects of his political theory and to recognize the danger to women posed by the popularity of Rousseau’s writings’, but defers the issue of Rousseau’s fame and his effect upon women, arguing that this would be a speculative study of influence, rather than a study of the inner logic of the texts (196-7). Thomas goes on to justify his claim of the inner consistency of Rousseau’s sexual politics by pointing out that his models of gender were rhetorical rather than reflections of a fundamental philosophical commitment to essential difference; in short, complementary genders are useful to society, and in order to persuade an Enlightenment audience of this, they must be presented as natural (202 *et passim*). However, in order to make this claim, Thomas must interpret Rousseau’s numerous straightforward declarations of woman’s nature as pure rhetoric, while principles of political expedience are apparently the more authentic theory. Rousseau himself forms no such unambiguous dichotomy, slipping between pragmatist arguments and those which rely on the final, authoritative ‘voice’ of nature. Thomas’s argument, reflected in the question mark in his title (‘Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Sexist?’), is that Rousseau’s sexual politics are instrumental *rather than* raw declarations of man’s natural superiority. Yet, it is

difficult to think of an example of 'sexist' ideology which does not also resort to pragmatist claims. In terms of British periodical culture, Rousseau's doctrine of gender complementarity was a useful version of the increasingly prevalent complementarity thesis, inasmuch as Rousseau's model was consistent, fully developed, and persuasive. We need not sketch a speculative image of historical readers in order to identify the elements of *Emile* that were most useful for the periodicals which sponsored him; these elements were identified quite explicitly, and were thus available to Wollstonecraft's critique as well.

Rousseau's sponsors in British periodicals make it clear that *Emile* is an argument for innate and complementary sex difference. The *Critical Review*, which excerpted 4000 words from *Emile*, prefaced this material with the following assertion: 'What are defects and failings in men, are essential qualities in women' (21). The two sexes are not only differentiated by nature, but nature determines women's character to a greater extent than it does men's. This is a common gloss of *Emile* and such statements form part of Rousseau's public image in Wollstonecraft's literary context, as Bannet has pointed out (162-4; cf. 141). Catharine Macaulay, for example, in *Letters on Education*, takes it as axiomatic that Rousseau is '[a]mong the most strenuous asserters of a sexual difference in character' (205). Thus, Wollstonecraft's critique of *Emile* must be considered for both its close reading of the 1762 translation of Book 5, *Emilius and Sophia*, and for its understanding of a prevalent view of Rousseau as 'topos'.

In accordance with its function as a digest and promotion of *Emile*, the approving review in the *Critical* of 1763 gives a faithful paraphrase of the central claims of Book 5:

What we mistakenly call vanity in woman, is only a natural propensity to heighten those charms by which alone she preserves her equality, and governs while she pretends to obey: her subtilty and beauty become the guardians of her timidity and weakness. By these she is indemnified for inferiority in point of masculine qualities. We may conceive of Mr. Rousseau's system of female education from the following enchanting picture of the intended partner of Emilius. (*Critical Review* 15:22)

Rousseau's notion of compensation to women for their apparent loss of power in a complementary social model is summarised here; the term 'indemnified' comes directly from the translated text. In *Emile*, the issue of innate 'propensities', and any



claim of female 'inferiority', is phrased ambiguously, but this gloss presents Rousseau as frankly essentialist, to use the modern term. The promised excerpt then follows this opening statement.

The audience for this review, as we have seen in the case of the *Spectator*, includes women who are addressed through the language, if not always the substance, of rationalist argument. At the conclusion of the review, *Emile* is offered to an audience of educators:

Whoever peruses this volume with attention must be convinced, that, were our author's mode of education practicable in the present state of society, it is such as nature and reason dictate. As things are, it may be read to advantage by every *preceptor and parent*. (*Critical Review* 15:34; my emphasis)

The *Critical Review* evokes an audience for whom Wollstonecraft will compete.<sup>87</sup> The *Critical Review* is both identifying a readership for *Emile*, and reinforcing the notion of a network by which Rousseau's educational philosophy will be disseminated, to use Klancher's terminology. Accordingly, Wollstonecraft argues that young women do not have to necessarily read *Emile* in order to be 'rendered' weak by its doctrine. It is enough that their 'preceptors and parents' have done so.

While I agree with Shevelov that the periodical is an important mediator for gender doctrine at the start of the century, I want to demonstrate that its methodologies of containment are explicit and available for appropriation by women writers such as Wollstonecraft later in the century. The discursive context of rational appeal to an audience of 'parents and preceptors', which could so comfortably incorporate *Emile* into its ideological matrix, could also be turned against itself. Returning to earlier in the century, it becomes obvious that the politics of representation were quite current and explicit. The following is a pair of poems in the *Gentleman's Magazine* of 1733, one written by a 'Lady' who complains about male dominance, and the other an alternately gallant and reasoned response by a 'Gentleman':

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<sup>87</sup> In Jan Fergus's 'Women readers: a case study', a chart of women customers of a large bookseller, in the years 1746-84, illustrates that almost ten times more women read magazines than novels (161).

**Woman's hard FATE. By a Lady.**

How wretched is a woman's fate,  
No happy change her Fortune knows,  
Subject to man in every state,  
How can she then be free from woes?

In youth a father's stern command,  
And jealous eyes controul her will;  
A lordly brother watchful stands,  
To keep her closer captive still.

The tyrant husband next appears,  
With awful and contracted brow;  
No more a lover's form he wears,  
Her slave's become her sov'reign now.

If from this fatal bondage free,  
And not by marriage chains confin'd:  
But blest with single life can see,  
A parent fond, a brother kind.

Yet love usurps her tender breast,  
And paints a phoenix to her eyes,  
Some darling youth disturbs her rest,  
And painful sighs in secret rise.

Oh cruel pow'rs, since you've design'd,  
That man, vain man! should bear the sway,  
To a slave's fetters add a slavish mind,  
That I may cheerfully your will obey

(*Gentleman's Magazine* 3:371)

**THE ANSWER. By a Gentleman,**

How happy is a woman's fate,  
Free from care, and free from woe,  
Secure of man in ev'ry state,  
Her guardian-god below!

In youth a father's tender love,  
And well-experienced eye,  
Restrains her mind, too apt to rove,  
Enamoured with a toy.

Suppose her with a brother blest,  
A brother sure is kind;  
But in the HUSBAND stands confest,  
The father, brother, friend.

'Tis man's, to labour, toil, and sweat,  
And all his care employ,  
Honour, or wealth, or pow'r to get;  
'Tis woman's to enjoy.

But look we on those halcyon days,  
When woman reigns supreme;  
While supple man his homage pays,  
Full proud of their esteem.

How duteous is poor Strephon's love!  
How anxious is his care!  
Lest gentle Zephyrs play too rough,  
And discompose the fair.

Then say not, any pow'rs ordain,  
That man should bear the sway;  
When reason bids, let woman reign,  
When reason bids, obey.

According to Kathleen Kizer, early to mid eighteenth-century periodical commentary upon women gradually transitions from the 'boorish misogyny' of a Mr. Stonecastle of the *Universal Spectator*, whose diatribes are reprinted in the early numbers of the *Gentleman's Magazine*,<sup>88</sup> to the more 'modern' doctrine of complementarity (6). The

<sup>88</sup> In June 1738, for example, Mr. Stonecastle quotes *Paradise Lost* to justify the divine origin of husband as lord. Men who lose control of their wives, as did Adam, live to regret their Stonecastle then concludes: 'If all Husbands wou'd be more firm than Adam, and more fixed in their dissents, they will not be reduced to that self-condemning thought' (298)

social configuration that appears in these poems is of the earlier type, a model of sexual hierarchy rather than that of complementarity; in this system, women are to remain under the protection and direction of men. Furthermore, while this poem spans the Lady's entire life, any interactions outside of various love relationships with men are invisible. In other words, there is no autonomous social role contemplated for women.

At the same time, the Lady's 'character' is a wholly sensual one. In stanzas five and six, her thoughts revert constantly to 'love' when she is not in a marriage; her instinct forms imaginary sexual liaisons 'in her breast', and recreates the 'phoenix' of an impossible love in her heated imagination. Mary Poovey points out that 'female sexuality [...] was automatically assumed to be the defining characteristic of female nature' (19). Although the Lady's poem is very brief, it reflects various discursive postures. The Lady is given a political vocabulary, and endowed with rational argument. She complains of her 'lordly' brother, and a husband who is 'tyrant' and 'sov'reign'. The last stanza is significant in its use of a rational argument: If women were meant to obey without questioning, the Lady writes, then why do their minds exhibit a desire for freedom and not slavishness? The response completes the tableau of a rational woman being corrected by even more rational man. Male dominance is not, after all, the self-interested creation of men, says the Gentleman, but a feature of the nature of things, and not ordered by any 'pow'rs' other than reason itself.

Thus, Rousseau's manner of rebutting the 'complaining' woman by re-presenting her was already a feature of a discursive practice at least thirty years before *Emile* itself was absorbed into periodical culture. As in Rousseau, the 'reason' to which the Gentleman defers is not of the calculative variety, but a perceptive one. The Gentleman's form of reason recognises the fitness of things as they are, a version of the theodical formulation: 'Whatever is, is right'. It appears that there is a time in life when woman is to 'reign' and that is during her days of beauty, when lovers fall at her feet. According to the Gentleman's view of the stages of a woman's life, it is in this period of youth that women are the 'rulers'. At most other times, man is the 'guardian god below'. Just as Rousseau uses 'reason' to reaffirm prescriptive assertions of what 'nature' prescribes, the Gentleman here presents reason as being already in accord with nature.

The pair of poems is almost certainly written by a single male author, as a part of a literary tradition that has been well documented by Hilda Smith. Regarding the pamphlets of the late sixteenth through seventeenth centuries, Smith writes:

The authors often remained anonymous or used obvious pseudonyms, and seemingly wrote for profit, often replying to their own misogynistic tracts with equally glib pro-women pamphlets. These works were quite popular, going through a number of printings and eliciting published responses, both pro and con. (*English Feminists* 17)

The debate was conducted in separate texts, and is a part of the tradition of the 'querelle', which Barbara Taylor has cited (cf. 139). The two poems above can be seen as an incorporation of this pseudo-debate in single location. Periodicals, such as the *Gentleman's Magazine*, incorporate such debates in the virtual space of a literary forum, and in a number of generic forms.<sup>89</sup>

The use of poetry at this point in the development of the *Gentleman's Magazine* is significant because it was one of the primary genres by which women appeared in the print culture of the first half of the eighteenth century. The growing number of female contributors to periodicals has been chronicled by Roger Lonsdale in his anthology, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets*, a collection in which submissions to the *Gentleman's Magazine* are heavily represented.<sup>90</sup> At mid-century, this magazine had already published the poetry of Elisabeth Rowe, Mary Jones, Jane Brereton and Elizabeth Carter. According to Kathleen Kizer, rival editors taunted the *Gentleman's Magazine* as being 'run by ladies', particularly in response to the *Gentleman's* inclusion of letters and poems written by women.<sup>91</sup> As Kathleen Kizer documents, poetry was by far the preferred genre for literary contributions by women to the

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<sup>89</sup> *The Gentleman's Magazine* in particular begins as a digest of textual material drawn from publications in different genres, but featured most prominently small forms such as the broadsheet and single-author periodical (Reitan 13-4).

<sup>90</sup> *The Gentleman's Magazine* eagerly solicited these contributions. In 1734 a poetry contest was held in which the first prize was fifty pounds. A female correspondent, 'Fidelia', complained that, considering the improving quality of women's verse, fifty-five would have been preferable (Aug. 1734: 508).

<sup>91</sup> At the same time, the statistics indicate that even at *The Gentleman's*, women contributors were still heavily outnumbered. From 1732 to 1754, *The Gentleman's Magazine* published a total of 254 poems by women, an average of 11 a year, in a publication which printed 160 poems inserted annually (Kizer 6).

*Gentleman's Magazine*. Thus, the use of a poetic form in order to evoke and then dismiss a feminist argument fits in with the way readers would have experienced the opinions of women in print. And the identification of a category of writing set aside for women, if not its segregation, is reinforced by the format of the magazine, in which all poetry was placed at the back of each issue while a Parliamentary report, for instance, was at the front.

Jon Klancher conceptualizes how the periodical becomes a virtual space, the counterpart of the physical spaces of the early eighteenth-century coffeehouse. Further, the periodical can *envision* spaces that do not yet exist: 'the periodical text can be a space for imagining social formations still inchoate, and a means to give them shape' (*Audiences* 23-4). However, Klancher does not examine how the early eighteenth-century periodical is already segregated, as we have seen in its format. These visual and material cues add to the mechanisms by which literate women were managed. Taken together, the techniques I have been discussing in this section were also open to women writers who could, and did, experiment with all the parameters of textual production for their own purposes. One example, as I have discussed in the previous chapter, is how the formal characteristics of Catharine Macaulay's *Letters on Education* imply a model of pedagogical interaction. The mechanisms of containment and reconfiguration were not the exclusive province of a dominant male literary culture, and were available to women. If Clara Reeve's *The Progress of Romance*, set in the home of an autonomous female intellectual, is a representation of a public site where women have substantial authority, it is also an indictment of the cloistered social model evoked in the pair of poems I have examined in this section.<sup>92</sup> As I will show in the following section, part of Wollstonecraft's critical methodology is to contain *Emile* through its placement in a literary forum that very much resembles the literary periodical and the anthology, and to control Rousseau as a 'textual figure' within this forum.

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<sup>92</sup> As Lennard Davis has pointed out, the visual representations of the frontispieces of early broadsheets and ballads of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, which were forerunners of the novel, already depict the reader as *inside* the story as 'voyeur' and interlocutor (61). The frontispiece of Eliza Haywood's *Female Spectator*, which I have used as the frontispiece of this thesis, shows four women seated in a small library, discussing books with a female tutor. In the background is a bust of Sappho, suggesting the existence of a *female* literary tradition (*Blackwell Companion* 296).



### 3.4 The Management of *Emile* in *Rights of Woman*

In Chapter 3 of *Rights of Woman* the continuing critique of Rousseau does not operate solely through quotation and commentary as it did in the case of Milton. It also operates by placing Rousseau in relation to other writers. The materials that appear in Chapter 3 are organised in the following way: Foremost are four excerpts from *Emile* placed in footnotes, the first of which describes the complementary types of intelligence of the sexes. Day's *Sandford and Merton* is incorporated in order to lend 'authority' to Wollstonecraft's rejection of this notion. The second excerpt from *Emile*, in the literary genre of the anecdote or moral tale, is Rousseau's account of a little girl who finds it ungraceful to form the letter 'O'. Wollstonecraft states that this tale ought to be 'classed' with a collection of ephemeral anecdotes, again presenting *Emile* in relation to other texts. In addition, there are three brief tales by Wollstonecraft embedded in the running critical commentary. These tales illustrate the way in which Rousseau's ideas have permeated society. They are brief, realist moral tales, and as such invite comparison with the genres found in *Emile* and in *Sandford and Merton*. By bringing together these materials in a single chapter, Wollstonecraft produces a sort of contentious anthology, one that is an analogy to a contentious literary sphere in which women's writing can be equal or superior to the authoritative texts of men.

As we have seen, periodical practices offer Wollstonecraft a vocabulary of criticism and a form of authoritative agency, both of which appear in *Rights of Woman* in the critique of powerful male authors such as Milton and Rousseau. However, there is another dimension to Wollstonecraft's critical project, one that arises from having a number of texts presented in relationship with each other. The materials which Wollstonecraft deploys in *Rights of Woman* are subordinated to her didactic aims in the same manner as periodicals and anthologies mediated texts to their audiences. In the following discussion, I want to examine the connections between Wollstonecraft's procedures and those of the eighteenth-century anthology. These collections organise and segment text in order to advance a particular ideological aim or educational purpose. This gives the editor greater power relative to the individual authors he collects:

[T]hese collections not only embody a consensus of writers, but they are stamped with the authority of editors who were themselves gradually accruing more respectability throughout the century. (Benedict 'Anthology' 236-7)

The anthology normally homogenises its materials to give the impression of consensus, and 'literature' itself is increasingly organized as a retrospective of valued writings of the past. We have seen this strategy employed Richard Price and the commonwealthmen in order to give the impression of a juggernaut of historical figures who all contribute to the inexorable movement towards revolution (cf. 98-100). In contrast, literary homogeny in *Rights of Woman* is not a positive thing; it represents a 'prevailing opinion', the persistence of the misguided thinking of men who have always been interested in 'subjugating' women.

Before confronting Rousseau's influence, Wollstonecraft first engages with the philosophical discussion of sex difference. Thus, the first insertion of *Emile* in *Rights of Woman* comes in the midst of this discussion, in which Wollstonecraft alludes to Joseph Priestley and other authorities. She first cites a commonplace principle:

[O]n diligent inquiry, I find that strength of mind has in most cases been accompanied by superior strength of body, – natural soundness of constitution, – not that robust tone of nerves and vigour of muscles, which arise from bodily labour, when the mind is quiescent, or only directs the hands. (*VRW* 3.107)

Wollstonecraft declares that great intellectual accomplishments always require physical endurance, but distinguishes between the sort of physical capacity required for intellectual work, and that required for manual labour. Wollstonecraft values the former, and she mentions Shakespeare and Milton approvingly in this regard, noting that 'they must have had iron frames' (3.108). She then states that she 'will allow that bodily strength seems to give man a natural superiority over woman' (3.108). The Introduction to *Rights of Woman* had declared that '[a] degree of physical superiority cannot, therefore, be denied, and it is a noble prerogative!' (Intro.74), but in Chapter 3, the comparison between men and women is phrased more

provisionally, at this point only 'allowing' that men's strength '*seems*' to lead to greater 'virtue' (3.108).<sup>93</sup>

Although Wollstonecraft concedes some physical differences between the sexes, these have little relevance in discussions concerning female education: 'But I still insist that not only the virtue but the *knowledge* of the two sexes should be the same in nature, if not in degree [...]' (3.108). Ultimately, the degree of difference between men's and women's physical strength, while it may lead to a 'greater' attainment of virtue, is not relevant as a basis for social standing, because the presence of a moral and rational soul requires that both men and women be allowed to develop their faculties. Wollstonecraft's comment here continues:

[W]omen, considered not only as moral but as rational creatures, ought to endeavour to acquire human virtues (or perfections) by the *same* means as men, instead of being educated like a fanciful kind of *half* being – one of Rousseau's wild chimeras.\* (VRW 3.108)

Because women's rationality is a part of their spiritual constitution, they must be afforded equal opportunities for intellectual education. Thus, to deny women opportunities for this sort of development is to deny them a soul, a gambit already seen in the critique of Milton. At this point in Wollstonecraft's moral and philosophical manifesto, any statement that women have a different *type* of intelligence would appear to controvert the fundamental moral principle of the sexless soul, and it is precisely here that a passage from *Emile* is situated – the asterisk leads us to an extensive quotation in a footnote that takes up three pages in the 1792 edition. The passage quoted from *Emilius* begins in the following way:

'Researches into abstract and speculative truths, the principles and axioms of sciences – in short, everything which tends to generalize our ideas – is not the proper province of women; their studies should be relative to points of practice.' (*Emilius* 74; VRW 3.108)

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<sup>93</sup> This term, from an etymological point of view, is gendered, meaning 'manliness' in Latin. The range of usages even in a single text, such as *Rights of Woman*, indicates that it does not necessarily have strongly gendered overtones, being closer to a general rubric for 'attainment'. This is clear from Wollstonecraft's statement that 'Modesty is a virtue, not a quality' (VRW 7.192), in an explicit response to Rousseau's claim that 'The Supreme Being', a term which seems to be interchangeable here with the term 'nature', has conferred modesty upon women, and reason upon men (*Emile* 359).

Although elsewhere Wollstonecraft makes protestations of an even-handed treatment of an 'author's words', Rousseau's words do not appear in a very objective light here. Aside from the content of her argument, Wollstonecraft's prose style is part of her contentious rhetoric. The formal register at the start of Chapter 3 of *Rights of Woman* serves as a contrast to the passages from *Emile*, which she wants to characterize as poor reasoning, if not fanciful assertions.

In Wollstonecraft's own dismissive terms, the cited passage assumes that women are 'half-beings'. The syntax of her introductory comment makes it ambiguous as to whether the 'chimera' she refers to is Rousseau's ideal of woman, or his writing. According to Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary*, a 'chimera' is defined as 'A vain and wild fancy, as remote from reality as the existence of the poetical chimera, a monster feigned to have the head of a lion, the belly of a goat, and the tail of a dragon'. This describes both a negative aesthetic principle and the mythical half-beast. Wollstonecraft's descriptor is likewise as applicable to the divided female self, created by Rousseau's system, as it is to the allegedly fanciful and unrealistic nature of Rousseau's writing.<sup>94</sup> The use of this term closely follows Rousseau's own complaints about educational writing: 'In the common treatises of education they give us futile and pedantic lessons, concerning the chimerical duties of children' (*Emilius* 140). This claims that Rousseau as an educational writer supersedes his predecessors. In *Rights of Woman*, a similarly dismissive rhetoric demonstrates that Wollstonecraft means to displace Rousseau, and thus invalidate his ideology of sex difference.

The passages quoted from *Emile* structure much of Wollstonecraft's response in Chapter 3. Rousseau's declarations of innate female attributes alternate with an instrumental argument for the gendering of education. As I have mentioned above, in

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<sup>94</sup> An early example of this term as a description of *Emile* is Thomas Gray's comment in his letter to Thomas Wharton, 5 August 1763:

[E]verybody that has children should read it more than once, for though it abounds with his usual glorious absurdity, though his general scheme of education be an impractical *chimera*; yet there are a thousand lights struck out, a thousand truths better expressed than ever they were before, that may be of service to the wisest man. (qtd. in Warner 784; my emphasis)

The mention of an audience of actual parents suggests that *Emile* was indeed meant for *actual* 'mothers', and not just 'the wise', as Allan Bloom claims (4).

the discussion of Paul Thomas's study, Rousseau equivocates between two arguments, either declaring that the sexes are innately different, and therefore serve as models for ideal social structure, or, urging the *inculcation* of differences. Rousseau states further along in the passage: 'Women have most wit, men have most genius; women observe, men reason' (qtd. in *VRW* n.3.108), an apparently essentialist statement, which is followed by the integration of essentialist and instrumentalist positions:

'From the concurrence of both [types of intelligence] we derive the clearest light and the most perfect knowledge which the human mind is of itself capable of attaining. In one word, from hence we acquire the most intimate acquaintance, both with ourselves and others, of which our nature is capable; and it is thus that art has a constant tendency to perfect those endowments which nature has bestowed.' (qtd. in *VRW* n.3.109)

These concluding remarks return to the notion that education builds upon already existing sex difference, or 'endowments'. Wollstonecraft organises her critique so that it responds to both the essentialist position and the instrumentalist position expressed in this passage. This is reflected in the organisation of Chapter 3, which has begun with a philosophical discussion of innate sex difference, and ends with moral tales, dramatising how a young woman reared in Rousseau's 'system' of differentiated intellectual education is no good to herself, her children, or society.

In her response to Rousseau's first principle, the claim of innate sex difference, Wollstonecraft does not rely on her own rational/critical argument alone, but deploys another text. She introduces a quoted passage from Thomas Day's *Sandford and Merton* in the following manner:

[...] I am happy to find that the author of one of the most instructive books that our country has produced for children, coincides with me in opinion. I shall quote his pertinent remarks to give the force of his respectable authority to reason.\* (*VRW* 3.109)

A passage is then quoted in the footnote, visually a parallel to the passage from *Emile*. *Sandford and Merton* is a republican critique, and presents two contrasting exemplars. Sandford is strengthened by physical activity and exhibits good morals, while Merton is progressively weakened by a lack of physical and intellectual



challenge. He grows up in Jamaica and is followed by two 'Negroes' who do his every bidding, a situation that contributes to his debilitating moral and physical upbringing. In a review written in 1789 for the *Analytical Review*, Wollstonecraft had praised Day's 'questions, conversations, and lively representations of actions' (*AnRev* 174). However, as Barker-Benfield has noted, Day was a thoroughgoing patriarchal thinker, and a great admirer of Rousseau, as is evident in the ideal of physical toughening (*Sensibility* 151-2). However, when Day's text is introduced in *Rights of Woman*, it is presented in order to *reject* Rousseau. In the passage quoted in *Rights of Woman*, a 'respectable old man' describes his 'method' of educating his daughter through exposing her to physical and mental challenges. At one point, Day declares that 'if women are in general feeble both in body and mind, it arises less from nature than from education' (qtd. in *VRW* n.3.109). This basic reference to Lockean psychology is the reason the Day passage has been chosen, as a means to counter Rousseau's argument of innateness. Wollstonecraft has culled just that portion of *Sandford and Merton* that does 'coincide' with her. When Wollstonecraft declares that Day 'coincides with' her *against* Rousseau, she poses herself as a woman on equal footing with male writers, whether British or French, thus the mention of 'our country'. Ultimately, it is Wollstonecraft's own authority which is embodied in this co-ordination of texts.

The first passage from *Emile* discusses the intellectual characteristics of men and women, while the second passage inserted in Chapter 3 discusses social self-consciousness. The second passage is meant to provide an obvious contrast in style:

'I once knew a young person who learned to write before she learned to read, and began to write with her needle before she could use a pen. At first, indeed, she took it into her head to make no letter than the O: this letter she was constantly making of all sizes, and always the wrong way. Unluckily, one day, as she was intent of this employment, she happened to see herself in the looking-glass; when, taking a dislike to the constrained attitude in which she sat while writing, she threw away her pen, like another Pallas, and determined against making the O any more. Her brother was also equally averse to writing; it was the confinement, however, and not the constrained attitude, that most disgusted him.' (qtd. in *VRW* n.3.112: *Emilius* 29)

This young pair exemplifies another of Rousseau's gendered binaries; the little girl displays a social self-consciousness that seems to spring up in girls from an early

age, whereas boys seem naturally to yearn for freedom. Wollstonecraft's comment on this passage calls attention to how Rousseau's argument from nature is now embodied in the form of the personal anecdote. The paratextual element is significant as well. While Rousseau is relegated to the footnote, Wollstonecraft writes in the main text in the authoritative terms of a critic of aesthetics:

His ridiculous stories, which tend to prove that girls are *naturally* attentive to their persons, without laying any stress on daily example, are below contempt. And that a little miss should have such a correct taste as to neglect the pleasing amusement of making O's, merely because she perceived that it was an ungraceful attitude, should be selected with the anecdotes of the learned pig.\* (VRW 3.111-2; Wollstonecraft's emphasis)

By drawing attention to form through terms such as 'stories' and 'anecdotes', Wollstonecraft follows the literary permutations of Rousseau's proposition of female difference. If we consider the first two passages from *Emile* as a pair, Wollstonecraft comments imply that these are equally unreasonable, despite the generic languages they employ: the first, written in a more scientifically descriptive language, is a 'chimera', a wild fiction, while the anecdote is taken to be a 'ridiculous' claim to scientific deduction.

If Wollstonecraft had wanted to contrast two passages on the basis of content rather than form, she might have used another quotation from Book 5 of *Emile*. I quote here from the Kenrick translation, *Emilius and Sophia*:

Girls are from their earliest infancy fond of dress. Not content with being pretty, they are desirous of being thought so. We see, by all their little airs, that this thought engages their attention; and they are hardly capable of understanding what is said to them, before they are to be governed by talking to them of what people will think of their behaviour. The same motive, however indiscreetly made use of with boys, has not the same effect: provided they are left to pursue their amusements as pleasure, they care very little what people think of them. Time and pains are necessary to subject boys to this motive. (*Emilius and Sophia* 21)

This passage is actually quoted by Wollstonecraft in Chapter 5 (5.149), but is not employed here where it would obviously be a more explicit statement of the same concept concerning dress. This makes precisely the same point as the story of the 'O' but in a removed, third-person narration that is closer to the generic language of the

first passage quoted. Rousseau declares that male nature tends so strongly towards individual freedom that it is only with constant pressure that it can become 'deformed', to use the vocabulary of the *Discourse on Inequality*. Apparently, female nature is more pliable and innately more conformable to social norms.<sup>95</sup> Taken out of context, this statement appears unequivocally essentialist, as does the anecdote that Wollstonecraft quotes.<sup>96</sup>

The fact that this passage is a more direct declaration of sex difference proves that Wollstonecraft has quoted the story of 'O' in order to draw the reader's attention to its *form* as a 'story' or 'anecdote', and not only its content.<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, Wollstonecraft invites her reader to classify it accordingly, stating that it should be 'selected with the anecdotes of the learned pig' (cf. 171). This alludes to a street show commented upon by Samuel Johnson, and discussed in several texts, including Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, Piozzi's *The Anecdotes of Samuel Johnson*, and Sarah Trimmer's educational tract, *Fabulous Histories*.<sup>98</sup>

At this point in Chapter 3, Wollstonecraft's register has shifted from philosophical disquisition to invective more commonly found in reviews. The three passages that have so far appeared are also in different generic languages: Rousseau's rational/scientific declarations of women's intelligence, Day's use of the fable, and Rousseau's anecdote. Gary Kelly, in *Revolutionary Feminism*, argues that the 'generic hybridity' of *Rights of Woman* implies a subversion of the gendered hierarchy of genre. He gives a thumbnail sketch of how generic languages were

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<sup>95</sup> In the next chapter, I will show that Wollstonecraft finds the substance of this passage reproduced in Rousseau's unknowing 'followers', such as John Gregory, in particular the notion of 'governing' women by exacerbating a sense of self-consciousness.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. Weiss 92-3 for an analysis of this passage (which she quotes from the Bloom translation) that argues the opposite.

<sup>97</sup> It is unlikely that in this case Wollstonecraft would have missed this statement eight pages before the story of 'O'. In all three of her central critiques there is considerable closeness of allusion and little misquoting. In the story of 'O' for example there are only two slight alterations from the original.

<sup>98</sup> Samuel Johnson's commentary on a 'learned pig' he saw at a country fair is relayed in Chapter 9 of Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, and is discussed at length in Sarah Trimmer's instructional book, *Fabulous Histories. Designed for the instruction of children, respecting their treatment of animals*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (1786): 71-76. Hester Thrale Piozzi (1741-1821) was a bluestocking and friend of Samuel Johnson. The *Anecdotes*, first published in 1786, are still her best-known work. This anthology excerpts Boswell's observations from his biography of Johnson, and includes Piozzi's own anecdotes from her acquaintance with Johnson.

gendered in this period: 'Masculine' writing, in the eighteenth-century perspective, would be 'objective, detached, learned, syllogistic or sarcastic and sharply polemical', while 'feminine' writing would be 'belletristic, domestic, personal', with a 'relative lack of formal argument' (108). Kelly argues that *Rights of Woman* works by 'relativizing' and therefore 'equalising' genres. In other words, by placing generic languages such as that of the philosophical treatise or theological sermon in juxtaposition with those of the maxim or anecdote, Wollstonecraft subverts the gender associations attached to these genres, the first being associated with men and the second with women (114-5). Thus, 'the equality in difference of women's discourses to men's' [...] represent the equality in difference of women to men' (115). However, generic 'hybridity' is so commonplace in contemporary literary culture that it may not by itself imply subversion in the manner that Kelly claims. Wollstonecraft does not 'relativize' genres so that they may no longer be gendered, but assumes this immediately, and there is little evidence in *Rights of Woman* that Wollstonecraft is arguing for a literary egalitarianism, as it were, in which a novelistic genre would be every bit as valuable as a philosophical genre.

Instead, Wollstonecraft guides her reader to reassess genre as a vehicle for various social and political agendas, which leads to a literary critique that sometimes coincides with a gendered hierarchy of writing, and sometimes does not. Two brief examples I will offer here illustrate these critical postures. The first example is Wollstonecraft's exaltation of Catharine Macaulay's opus as 'masculine', an opus which consisted primarily of didactic, historical, and political works. Another example is Wollstonecraft faulting Anna Laetitia Barbauld for writing a poem which parrots a genre of gallant flattery. Her argument there is not that the genre of the short dedicatory sonnet is *as good* as a treatise on education but that the choice of such a genre and its vapid descriptive language demeans women and fills their heads with flattery instead of exhorting them to attend to their self-development. I will treat this poem in detail at the start of the following chapter of this thesis. To return to Kelly's interpretation of the presence of various genres in *Rights of Woman*, I argue that this 'hybridity' cannot be seen an implicit levelling of genre, or a means of de-gendering literary genres. Instead, each generic language which appears in the text is an equally valid means of conveying a political argument. Thus, the language of the philosophical essay, the generic language which dominates Chapter 1, is meant to

make clear the principles of progress and republicanism upon which the rights of both men and women should be based.

The epistle to Talleyrand which opens the text is the most plausible vehicle for a measured rational appeal to a political figure, an appeal which is designed to influence national policy. And, as I have been arguing throughout this thesis, the literary critical language which dominates much of Chapters 2, 3, and 5 is a reasonable and immediately recognizable means by which to isolate and attack the ideology of male supremacy as it appears in highly influential works of literature, works that in Wollstonecraft's estimation have given rise to countless texts that reinforce not only the 'prevailing opinions' concerning women, but help to maintain prevailing educational practices which continue to produce weakened women. In those sections of *Rights of Woman* in which Wollstonecraft examines the literary works of her opponents, the subversive activity does not consist in valuing 'female' writing equally with 'male' writing. The subversive activity consists in divesting male writing of any authority based on criteria such as reputation, eloquence, or a language of rationality. It is on this basis that Rousseau's alleged 'observation' of a girl who avoided writing the letter 'O' is only speciously empirical.

*Rights of Woman* does not imply that all genres are equally valid, but that they can be equally *dangerous* – equally capable of carrying an ideology of gender that can be disseminated in different ways. The first excerpt from *Emile* cannot be considered an example of sensiblist writing, but it is as much a 'chimera' as the 'ridiculous' story that follows. The Day quotation employs a mythical setting, yet Wollstonecraft has no problem using it as a vehicle that reaffirms a fundamental Lockean precept.<sup>99</sup> In other words, the reader is asked to become aware of the generic forms of texts as a feature of their rhetoric. The very brief allusion to 'the learned pig', an item which appeared in anthologies by women is important because it chides the uncritical woman reader and *writer*. Such indiscriminate readers and writers are apparently amused by the story of 'O' rather than troubled by its assumption of female inferiority. When Piozzi appears later in *Rights of Woman* she is characterised as a slavish imitator of Johnson: 'Mrs Piozzi, who often repeated by rote, what she did not understand, comes forward with Johnsonian periods', and a short passage from

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<sup>99</sup> Wollstonecraft experimented with this form in her posthumously published manuscript 'The Cave of Fancy' (1798) (*The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, vol. 1).



Piozzi's writing is accordingly provided as an illustration (*VRW* 5.171-2; cf. 82). Piozzi appears not simply as a weak writer, but as the model of the weak *reader*; her text, quoted by Wollstonecraft, is evidence of her uncritical reading. Piozzi's text is overwritten by another, more dominant author in a manner analogous to the effect of literary texts upon women's identities.

### 3.5 The Autonomous Female Reader

What exactly does Wollstonecraft identify in Rousseau's text as the effective means by which he has persuaded even intellectual women, such as Barbauld and Piozzi, of his assertions? In *Women and the Public Sphere*, Joan Landes notes that Rousseau specifically addresses women: 'He did not just write about women. He wrote to them' (67).<sup>100</sup> Wollstonecraft also engages women in a particular way, and in the specific case of her comments on Piozzi, it is an opportunity to dispense prescriptions on reading practice for women readers, and women writers as well. This is developed in section five of Chapter 5 of *Rights of Woman*. Among this audience are those who read Rousseau, and educate their charges according to his 'system'. Like Rousseau, Wollstonecraft addresses this audience explicitly:

The mother who wishes to give true dignity of character to her daughter must, regardless of the sneers of ignorance, proceed on a plan diametrically opposite to that which Rousseau has recommended with all the deluding charms of eloquence and philosophical sophistry, for his eloquence renders absurdities plausible, and his dogmatic conclusions puzzle, without convincing, those who have not ability to refute them. (*VRW* 3.110)

This passage identifies the two types of rhetoric embodied in the first two excerpts from *Emile*. For Wollstonecraft, it is not 'eloquence' alone that characterises Rousseau's writing, but 'plausibility', 'dogmatic conclusions' and 'sophistry'. The identification of a rationalist element in Rousseau, even in an allegedly sophistic form, accounts for the influence of *Emile* beyond a readership of vulnerable, or

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<sup>100</sup> Amy Elizabeth Smith has done a statistical analysis of the linguistic features of *Rights of Woman* such as pronoun reference, and concludes that women are explicitly addressed 34% of the time, and men 24% of the time ('Roles for Readers' 557).

‘sensible’, female readers, and at the same time, establishes Wollstonecraft’s authoritative role as interpreter for those readers who are ‘puzzled’.

Wollstonecraft’s address to ‘the mother’ competes for *Emile*’s audience, an audience that was specifically hailed by his British sponsors who aimed the text at ‘parents and preceptors’. Rousseau’s appeals to this constituency at the beginning of *Emile*, and again at the start of Book 5, where, after the lengthy and separate treatment of the education of Emile, female education is now the primary concern:

This collection of reflections and observations, disordered and almost incoherent, was begun to gratify a good mother who knows how to think. (*Emile* 33)

It is to you that I address myself, tender and foresighted mother [...]. (*Emile* 37)

Believe me, judicious mother, do not make a decent man of your daughter, as though you would give nature the lie. Make a decent woman of her, [...]

(*Emile* 364)

The term ‘mothers’ is not strictly literal but is a rubric for educators in general; beyond that, the use of an educational narrative is a vehicle for Rousseau’s political philosophy. Its most recent translator, Allan Bloom claims that the ‘true addressees’ of *Emile* are not parents, but elite readers of political theory (28). These are not, however, mutually exclusive audiences. Bloom quotes a letter of Rousseau’s in support of this claim: ‘[*Emile*] is a new system of education, the plan of which I present for the study of the wise and not a method for fathers and mothers [...]

(qtd. in Bloom 4).<sup>101</sup> But this would not be the only time that one comment in the writings of Rousseau contradicts another. Bloom’s discovery is complicated by Rousseau repeated addresses to mothers in *Emile*, and its reception in Britain at least, reflects this. The *Critical Review* sees the text as useful to all ‘parents and preceptors’, and another contemporary reader, Thomas Gray, writes: ‘[E]verybody that has children should read it more than once’ (qtd. in Warner 784). Aside from the obvious political

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<sup>101</sup> Rousseau, *Letters Written from the Mountain V*, *Ouvres Complètes*, 3.783.

implications of *Emile*, it can be assumed that much of the British readership also took the text as a manual for educators.<sup>102</sup>

Wollstonecraft's first widow's tale illustrates what happens when educators heed Rousseau's advice. The story is as follows: A young woman has been raised according to Rousseau's 'system'; she is, in essence, Sophie in the real world. She has married a 'sensible man, who directs her judgement' (cf. 123). He is 'sensible' because he does not make 'her feel the servility of her subjection'. But because her husband has taken the Adamic role as mediator of knowledge, or 'judgment', the young wife can only 'act with as much propriety by this reflected light as can be expected when reason is taken at secondhand'. The image of reflected light, a metaphor for mediated subjectivity, refers the reader back to Wollstonecraft's critique of Milton. Wollstonecraft insists that the patriarchal structure of actual society is idealised in *Emile*, which has done its part to sustain it. This young widow exemplifies a fact of life in this period; there is little legal provision for widows, and the very real possibility may arise that a woman 'cannot ensure the life of her protector; he may die and leave her with a large family'.<sup>103</sup> After the death of her husband, the widow looks for support, or for rescue, but male acquaintances turn out to be 'fortune-hunters' who seek to defraud her. Finally, 'the vices of licentious youth bring her with sorrow, if not with poverty also, to the grave' (*VRW* 3.117-8). Upon the death of this widow, Rousseau is again quoted in a footnote: 'O how lovely,' exclaims Rousseau, speaking of Sophia, 'is her ignorance! Happy is he who is destined to instruct her! (n.3.118). The juxtaposition of this quotation with the demise of the young woman makes Rousseau appear grossly insensitive to the real lives of women. The visual contrast between Wollstonecraft's imagery of physical ruin and Rousseau's blithe exclamation serves to dramatise his writing as out of touch with reality, further caricatured by the manner in which Wollstonecraft has placed it in a different narrative context.

The young woman's downfall is associated with the influence of *Emile*, but not to her *own* reading of this text. This woman has been 'trained in obedience', has been 'taught', and consequently 'learned' only 'to please'. Wollstonecraft concludes that the widow 'only acts as a woman ought to act, *brought up* according to Rousseau's

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<sup>103</sup> The connection between Wollstonecraft's writing and the contemporary legal status of women is discussed in the next chapter with reference to the work of Gillian Skinner.

system' (*VRW* 3.118). It is the parent who is responsible for the young woman's demise, and in the background are Rousseau and *Emile*, which appear again in the form of two footnotes. The target of this moral tale is apparently the 'mother' who is better advised to follow Wollstonecraft's lead than Rousseau's. Accordingly, another exemplary tale is offered, in which a young woman is formed according to Wollstonecraft's principles; her body has been 'allowed to acquire its full vigour', and her mind has 'gradually expand[ed] to comprehend the moral duties of life' (3.119). This woman also marries and is left a widow, but because of her hardier upbringing, which is, nevertheless, not above 'the line of mediocrity', she is able to raise her children well, and at her death has the satisfaction of having lived a good life.

The pair of widows' tales in *Rights of Woman* has been seen by G.J. Barker-Benfield as another manifestation of the contemporary discourse of sensibility. He contextualises Wollstonecraft's tales amongst women's novels of the period which make the crucial distinction between excessive 'sensibility' and the wiser cultivation of 'sense':<sup>104</sup>

Wollstonecraft [...] contrasted the lives of two hypothetical women, one reared to excessive sensibility, the other to a sensibility checked by reason. In fact, the implicit but clear alternatives Wollstonecraft presented throughout are between a woman reared to crippling exaggerated sensibility, utterly dependent and subject to emotional binges, and herself, the writer, capable of reasoned analysis, physically strong, independently minded, yet inspired with the positive warmth of sensibility. (*Sensibility* 361)

Barker-Benfield points out that Wollstonecraft faults the version of sensibility which arises from 'gallantry' and 'novels', and that a distinction between a tempered sensibility and a more indulgent variety can be read in these tales. However, as I have shown, Chapter 3 is not primarily concerned with sensibility per se, but with the range of languages and genres which lead to the weakening of women, or the outright formation of their characters, which Wollstonecraft terms 'rendering'. This problem goes beyond the reading of novels, but is endemic to all sorts of male

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<sup>104</sup> Barker-Benfield lists the following, quoted from Marilyn Butler: *Sense and Sensibility*, *A Simple Story* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Jane West's *A Gossip's Story* (1796), Burney's *Camilla* (1796), Edgeworth's *Vivian* (1812) and *Patronage* (1814), and Mary Brunton's *Self-Control* (1812) and *Discipline* (1814).

writing. Significantly, then, the first widow's downfall occurs not because she reads novels, or faints at the sight of a mouse – Wollstonecraft provides these caricatures elsewhere. Her tragic end is due to a lack of personal power and respectable social standing, which in turn has come from her parents' reading of a particular novel, one that has influenced any number of writers in different genres. The novel which Wollstonecraft attacks is not one which is particularly provocative of the reader's sensibility. According to Wollstonecraft, *Emile* has appealed to the reason of the young widow's parents, however specious or 'sophistical' Rousseau's argumentation may be.



### John Gregory and other descendants of Rousseau: Wollstonecraft's Theory of a Reproductive Tradition of Male Writing

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#### 4.0 Introduction

In *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft employs literary criticism to reject models of femininity promulgated by three influential male writers who represent for her a historical tradition of literary 'invention' designed to 'subjugate' women (2.95). Although each of Wollstonecraft's critiques displays a range of methods, I have emphasized one primary dimension in each case, moving from the technical to the more explicitly theoretical methodologies. In Chapter 2, I have examined Wollstonecraft's strategy of quotation and commentary in her engagement with Milton, and in Chapter 3, Wollstonecraft's contentious practice of anthologizing, by means of which she attacks Rousseau's *Emile* through direct comparisons with other contemporary educational writing. In this chapter, I turn to Wollstonecraft's critique of John Gregory, author of the popular conduct book, *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (1774), and other writers whom she finds susceptible to Rousseau's ideology. With the critique of Gregory, Wollstonecraft completes the exposition of one of the central theoretical assumptions behind her literary criticism, that of the intertextual reproduction of social gender norms over time and across genres.

In contrast to the reviews for the *Analytical Review*, the primary focus in *Rights of Woman* is upon a canon of male writers rather than the female reader, and Wollstonecraft's theory of ideological reproduction is expressed in the first literary critique, at the start of Chapter 2 of *Rights of Woman*. Immediately after her critique of Milton, as we have seen, she states that a 'stream of popular opinion' takes hold of 'a century'. Milton participates in a historical literary tradition that begins with Moses, a tradition which justifies male physical domination through 'invention', that is, through writing (VRW 2.95). In this transitional section of Chapter 2, Wollstonecraft moves quickly from Milton to succeeding generations of writers.

Writing a century after Milton, Rousseau is shown to be dangerous not only for his own efforts in *Emile*, but because he has followers in Wollstonecraft's own generation, who in turn write texts that affect public opinion.

*Rights of Woman* contains critiques of both male and female writers and it is important to analyze the way in which Wollstonecraft situates herself among public women intellectuals. Ultimately, however, her central target is a 'tradition' of male writers, and, in order to prove her theory of literary reproduction as it works upon these writers, Wollstonecraft extrapolates from contemporary theories of the effect of literature upon the susceptible woman reader. As I have pointed out in the introduction, Wollstonecraft's view of susceptibility to written texts is based on the contemporary theory of psychological association, which was drawn from Locke's account of identity formation. For Wollstonecraft, literature is the crucial site where women's notions of themselves, indeed their identities, are formed and reinforced (VRW 6.186-87; cf. 30-35). Wollstonecraft argues that a set of reiterated prescriptions divide the reader's identity; a public role that is at odds with an authentic private self. Virginia Sapiro notes that the issue of public and private is thematic to Wollstonecraft, who 'challenged the political version of schizophrenia that even drives a wedge between public and private within an individual person' (179). Many conduct books criticized acquiescence to public norms, especially when these norms reflected the supposed sexual license of courtly culture, but generally the responsibility fell upon the young reader, rather than upon her parents or other writers of advice literature. In contrast, Wollstonecraft asserts that the inculcation of weak and divided identities in women originates in texts whose authors themselves have undergone the same experience. The pressure to conform to public roles works upon men as well as women, writers as well as readers, but most significantly for Wollstonecraft's feminist argument, upon the male writers of educational literature.

In the following introductory section I introduce Gregory's *A Father's Legacy* and Wollstonecraft's central claim of his fragmented public persona. Subsequently, Section 4.1 extends the discussion of Rousseau from the previous chapter. Having shown that Rousseau's argument for essential sexual difference is only speciously rational and scientific, Wollstonecraft turns to his more effective mode of keeping women out of the public, the inculcation of a public erotic identity. This is precisely the mechanism which Gregory adopts from Rousseau. This section includes another

of Wollstonecraft's illustrations of Rousseau's influence upon her contemporaries – the disappointing educational plan of the French revolutionary figure Talleyrand, the plan which has ostensibly prompted Wollstonecraft to respond with *Rights of Woman*. Section 4.2 analyzes Wollstonecraft's theory of influence as she sees it operating in the writing of Anna Laetitia Barbauld. I situate the critique of Barbauld in the context of other women writers and the feminist/anti-feminist debate in the 1790s. In Section 4.3, I analyze Wollstonecraft's critique of Gregory, which employs two primary strategies: the problematizing of literary fame, and examination of his authorial self-representation. Ultimately, demotion of Gregory's widely praised conduct book opens the field for Wollstonecraft's own agenda for reform of women's social roles.

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First published in 1774, *A Father's Legacy* was among the most popular of all conduct books in Wollstonecraft's time, remaining in print until the mid-nineteenth century, and often bound with Hester Chapone's *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* (1783).<sup>105</sup> John Gregory was born in 1724 in Aberdeen, where he studied classical languages and then went on to read medicine at the University of Edinburgh. He travelled to Leyden to complete his medical studies and returned to Scotland, where he was active in Enlightenment intellectual circles along with his cousin Thomas Reid. In this period, Gregory published a conjectural history, *A Comparative View of the State and Faculties of Man, with those of the animal world* (1764), as well as a set of lectures and the medical tract, *Elements of the Practice of Physic* (1770).<sup>106</sup> In 1773, after the death of his wife, Gregory became aware that he was terminally ill. He wanted to leave a 'legacy' for his two daughters, the set of educative principles and strictures he and his wife would have employed. The circumstances surrounding the publication of *A Father's Legacy* are made to resemble a sentimental narrative, and are emphasized by both the author and the editor. The opening reads,

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<sup>105</sup> For evidence of Gregory's popularity, see Jacqueline Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain* (43), and Kathy Hickok, *Representations of Woman* (33). These separate studies draw their statistics from two main sources. They look at the records of lending libraries and quantify the number of new editions of particular texts.

<sup>106</sup> Biographical information is drawn from the *Biographical Dictionary of Eminent Scotsmen* (1835), ed. Robert Chambers.

*My Dear Girls*

You had the misfortune to be deprived of your mother, at a time of life when you were insensible of your loss, and could receive little benefit, either from her instruction, or her example. – Before this comes to your hands, you will likewise have lost your father. (25-26)

John Gregory died the same year and, judging by the success and influence of his book, seems to have clearly understood the rhetorical power of his life story.

*A Father's Legacy* delivers advice on religion, public behaviour, and marriage, in this order, which reflects the traditional organization of the conduct book. Women's interaction in public, especially with men, is a central concern, and Gregory advises 'decorum' and 'modesty' as guiding principles. Like the behavioural standards presented in *Emile*, 'modesty' is meant to preserve the social reputation of women so that they may marry well. However, Gregory appears to aim at a less submissive form of femininity than that found in *Emile* and encourages his daughters to develop their own inner resources after his death:

I have had many melancholy reflections on the forlorn and helpless situation you must be in, if it should please God to remove me from you, before you arrive at that period of life, when you will be able to think and act for yourselves. (26)

The notion that the two women can 'think and act for' themselves seems an advance on earlier paternalistic models, such as we have seen in the pair of poems from the *Gentleman's Magazine* (cf. 161). However, Wollstonecraft points to other aspects of Gregory's advice which are complicit with coercive public norms. She asks whether he is an advocate for his daughters, protecting them *from* social pressures, or joining *with* society to pressure them. Indeed, Gregory starts off in the role of the doting father, girding his daughters for the pressures of public life by citing the 'falsehood, dissipation, and coldness' of 'mankind' (26-27). He tells his daughters that he is most likely the only man who will ever speak the truth to them (31-32). As overly solicitous as this may be, he seems to abandon this role when he aligns himself with public men by agreeing that certain public behaviours of women cause him, as a member of *his* sex, to disapprove of the members of *theirs* (*Legacy* 34-35).

Wollstonecraft claims that Gregory's persona wavers between a father whose sincere advice is represented authentically, and a sermonizing writer, who is tailoring his text to the tastes of the reading audience. Wollstonecraft's focus on Gregory's self-representation is a means by which the alleged 'benevolence' and innocuousness of this text is demystified. In this way, Wollstonecraft weakens its influence and asserts her own literary and moral authority. Instead of the sympathetic figure the reader expects, 'we pop on the author' (*VRW* 5.199). Wollstonecraft's complaint illuminates tensions within the conduct book as a commercial print product that must offer both specificity and an appeal to a wide audience.<sup>107</sup> The question is whether this tension is endemic to *all* conduct books which feature a father figure, a more general judgment which is implied in *Rights of Woman* when it becomes clear that there are no positive models of the unmediated sincerity and 'paternal benevolence' that Gregory might have exhibited.

While the persona of the fond, paternal Dr Gregory imparts an appeal to the text evocative of sentimental fictional narratives, its form as a 'legacy' invokes the finality of patriarchal authority. The hypothetical interaction which is available in representations of dialogues or epistolary forms, such as we have seen in Clara Reeve's *Progress of Romance*, which allows the male interlocutor Hortensius questions and doubts, or Catharine Macaulay's *Letters on Education*, for example, which represents a colloquy between the tutor and her student Hortensia, is not present here. Like a last will and testament (or an immutable political constitution), the form of *A Father's Legacy* does not allow for response or amendment to the author's 'advice'. The educator of the two orphaned women is the text itself, foreclosing backtalk not only by virtue of the didactic sermonizing which was typical of advice literature, but also by means of the legalistic concept of a 'legacy', a final communication from the dead to the living.

The more authoritarian aspects of *A Father's Legacy* are part of a longstanding paternal conduct book practice. Hilda Smith, who concentrates on the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, points out that the control of young women's sexual behaviour is ultimately motivated by the necessity to maintain paternal property rights. In this sense, women themselves, as mothers of heirs, are the

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<sup>107</sup> Iain Pears has pointed out that it is commonplace for Enlightenment writing to appeal simultaneously to a general and an elite readership. In Pears's estimation, this was a commercial consideration (432).



means by which these rights are transferred to posterity (11). In speaking of the 'faithless wife' Rousseau remarks,

To my mind, it is the source of dissension and of crime of every kind. Can any position be more wretched than that of the unhappy father who, when he clasps his child to his breast, is haunted by the suspicion that this is the child of another, the badge of his own dishonour, a thief who is robbing his own children of their inheritance. (*Emile* 324-25)

The economic motivation for the control of women, both single and married, persists from the earlier period and is reinscribed in republican discourse. As we will see, Talleyrand, writing during the French Revolution, also insists that the 'conservation' of society depends on women's roles as faithful wives, as we will see. As is amply proven in Kathryn Shevelow's work on paternal authorial agency in conduct books and periodicals (cf. 156-58), these cultural prescriptions are the essence of advice literature, even as the literary and social context shifts considerably from the late seventeenth century to Wollstonecraft's time. In fictional narratives, paternal authority is often resisted but ultimately must be appeased. As we have seen in Chapter 1, the conclusion of Charlotte Smith's *Emmeline* is one example amongst many. Even when fictional heroines eventually marry the man of their choice, reconciliation with a father-figure is an indispensable component of the denouement, and legacies, wills, and testaments frequently determine the terms under which a young heroine will live after marriage.

Wollstonecraft's critique illuminates how *A Father's Legacy* reflects another tension between social models. According to social historians, in the later half of the eighteenth-century women could be educated for a measure of self-sufficiency as long as their social functions were separate and well-defined, the model of complementarity and separation of social spheres discussed in the previous chapter. However, even in the supposedly more 'enlightened' version of the separate-spheres model, there is still great anxiety over direct competition of the sexes in the public sphere. This is reflected in Gregory's argument against assertive women:

By the present mode of female manners, the women seem to expect that they shall regain their ascendancy over us, by the fullest display of their personal charms, by being always in our eye at public places, by conversing with us in the same unreserved freedom as we do with one another; in short, by

resembling us as nearly as they possibly can. But a little time and experience will shew the folly of this expectation and conduct. (75-76)

*A Father's Legacy* does not mention bluestockings or any other literary women, and this complete occlusion of any public role for intellectual women, in 1774, seems to revert to what Barbara Taylor and others have defined as the traditional '*querelle des femmes*', that is, the stylised battle of the sexes (*Imagination* 87). Moreover, Gregory genders intellectual sociability as male, which links him more strongly to Rousseau than to 'modern' social models which allow for female public speech, such as that of the bluestockings. This is a connection between Rousseau and Gregory that is repeatedly exploited by Wollstonecraft, and one that has been reiterated in modern studies, as we will see in the following section.

#### 4.1 The Transmission of a 'Prevailing Opinion of a Sexual Character'<sup>108</sup>

Wollstonecraft names Rousseau as the primary source of gender ideology, that is, a 'prevailing opinion of a sexual character', as it manifests in the writing of her contemporaries. In *Rights of Woman*, the thematic conflict between complicity and intentionality recurs in almost every critique of individual writers. Hester Thrale Piozzi imitates Johnsonian diction 'by rote'; Milton owes a debt to a tradition of male writing; Fordyce 'spins out Rousseau's eloquence' (*VRW* 5.163; cf. 213); and Rousseau is subject to environmental influences: 'Rousseau's observations, it is proper to remark, were made in a country where the art of pleasing was refined only to extract grossness of vice' (*VRW* 5.151). Rousseau is a special case for Wollstonecraft, because he is not simply the product of cultural influences, but is at the head of a tradition, and for this reason is referred to most often when building a chronology of 'male' writers.

John Gregory is an instructive model of unconscious complicity with Rousseau's doctrine, considering his apparent differences from Rousseau and his good reputation. Several other writers are seen as either directly influenced by Rousseau's writings or subject to the cultural regime he has helped to form. These are Madame de Staël, in the former case, and Talleyrand and Anna Laetitia Barbauld in the latter.

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<sup>108</sup> This is part of the title of Chapter 2 of *Rights of Woman*.

It is precisely because Rousseau's doctrine is embedded in his novel/treatise *Emile* that a literary critique is most effective in removing the 'superstructure' to reveal the urge to dominance which is at the heart of his writing, and the writing of an ongoing tradition of male 'invention'. The former term is used twice in *Rights of Woman*. The first time it appears, 'superstructure' refers to the superficially attractive character of Sophie as distinct from the fundamentally submissive posture she is taught to adopt, and the second time the reference is to the John Gregory's seemingly benevolent advice to his daughters in its literary form (*VRW* 2.93; 5.169-70). For Wollstonecraft, what lies beneath the 'superstructure' of apparently eloquent language or representations of benign paternal agency is the inculcation of eroticized public identity, the primary mechanism by which women's behaviour was controlled.

This was an inexorable norm. If women were too forward, they were said to exhibit a perverse sexuality, but even when they adhered to norms of 'modesty', which demand inhibition of speech and physicality, this was likewise interpreted as primarily erotic behaviour. Wollstonecraft's particular focus upon Rousseau as the central theorist of this ideology prefigures modern studies of the sexual politics of the eighteenth century. Both Joan Landes and Elizabeth Wingrove offer insightful accounts of the mechanisms by which women's political potential is regulated through the establishment of sexual identities, and in an examination of this strategy they turn to Rousseau's *The Letter to D'Alembert*. The rhetoric of this text does not operate primarily through appeals to 'nature', nor is the language sentimental; it is rather direct and pragmatic, detailing actual social regulations which ought to be instituted. Rousseau's ostensible aim is to reject D'Alembert's proposal in the *Encyclopedie* for a theatre in Geneva, but the text ultimately turns to an extended discussion of the danger posed by public women.

For Rousseau, a theatre provides a pretext for women to be seen in public, but more significantly, it allows them, through their opinions, to influence a medium that is already dangerous to the stability of the state because of its potential to deregulate the thoughts of citizens (*D'Alembert* 48-49). Rousseau's rejection of the theatre seems a pretext to his more pressing insistence that women are to be banned from the public. Rousseau is most concerned with *literary* activities of women, claiming that a public theatre would turn 'housewives into bluestockings' (64). The appropriation of allegedly male intellectual traditions by these women is a particular problem:

[I]n the theatre, learned in the learning of men and philosophers, thanks to the authors, they crush our sex with its own talents, and the imbecile audiences go right ahead and learn from women what they took efforts to dictate to them. (*D'Alembert* 49)

This clearly genders knowledge as male and warns that critical women endanger republican social stability.

Rousseau argues that the solution to the potential disruption of society by unregulated public female behaviour is the imposition of gendered norms of expression. Rousseau insists that any public roles for women, whether they transact business, or openly discuss literature, politics, or theology, be interpreted as expressions of improper sexuality:

[T]here are no good morals for women outside of a withdrawn and domestic life; if I say that the peaceful care of the family and the home are their lot, that the dignity of their sex consists in modesty, that shame and chasteness are inseparable from decency for them, that when they seek for men's looks they are already letting themselves be corrupted by them, and that any woman who shows herself off disgraces herself. (*D'Alembert* 82)

Thus, any female assertions of self in public which are not expressions of their sexuality, defined exclusively in terms of their relation to men, are immediately construed as deviantly sexual. In proposing new norms of behaviour that will stabilize society, Rousseau reinscribes female sexuality as a form of 'modesty' and limits their public identity within the bounds of this ideal. The affect of the frail and retiring woman is made the most desirable quality of all. To quote from a scene in *Emile* in which Rousseau describes Sophie,

When someone sees her, he says, "Here is a modest, temperate girl." But so long as he stays near her, his eyes and his heart roam over her whole person [...]; and one would say that all this very simple attire was put on only to be taken off piece by piece by the imagination. (*Emile* 394)

Rousseau's use of the male pronoun to represent the generic observer suggests that women's public image should be regulated by the male gaze. As Poovey points out, the 'modesty' which Rousseau idealizes is not a repudiation of public female eroticism, but is its most potent expression:

[M]odesty perpetuates the paradoxical formulation of female sexuality. For a modest demeanour served not only to assure the world that a woman's appetites were under control; it also indicated that female sexuality was still assertive enough to *require* control. That is, even as modesty was proclaimed to be the most reliable guardian of a woman's chastity – and hence the external sign of her internal integrity – it was also declared to be an advertisement for – and hence an attraction to – her sexuality. (21)

Thus, the sexuality which is evoked through 'modesty' is at least as specular as the emblematic representations of absolutist culture. For Poovey, the 'paradox' of modesty is explicable when it is understood as a way for men of this period to manage their fear of female sexuality. The fact that female sexuality required re-configuration was the surest sign of its potentially disruptive nature.

The emphasis on female exhibitionism is ultimately meant to curtail verbal expression, and conversely ideal femininity, from Rousseau's point of view, is best exemplified in the woman who watches her words in public. Wollstonecraft's focus upon Gregory as an influential exponent of Rousseau's thinking prefigures Mary Poovey, for instance, who finds Gregory's *Legacy* to be a good illustration of the equation of femininity with silence:

Modesty will naturally dispose you to be rather silent in company, especially in a large one. [...] one may take a share in conversation without uttering a syllable. The expression in the countenance shews it, and never escapes an observing eye. (qtd. in Poovey 24; *Legacy* 28)

As in Rousseau's doctrine, public speech is gendered male, while feminine desirability is expressed by means of a mute visual language, one that would be disrupted by speech. Poovey points out that it is the very silence required of the properly 'modest' woman that elicits positive attention from the public, indicated in Gregory's comment by the generic term 'observing eye'. Like Poovey, Wollstonecraft argued that the contemporary ideal of femininity was indeed primarily visual, 'an appropriated insignia', one that communicates through behaviour and appearance, rather than through speech (*VRW* 9.212). The observation of 'proper' forms of modesty displaces the rational critical speech that was the means



by which bourgeois men wrested power from the absolutist state to begin with, to follow Habermasian historiography.

Except for an allusion to *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts* in Chapter 1 (VRW 1.84), Wollstonecraft does not engage directly with Rousseau's theoretical works. Virginia Sapiro remarks that Wollstonecraft 'was not a Rousseau scholar or a scholar at all', and goes on to list which of Rousseau's works Wollstonecraft may or may not have read (n.323). Yet Wollstonecraft's choice of *Emile* coincides with Rousseau's own assessment that it is the best expression of his doctrine.<sup>109</sup> Furthermore, because *Emile* promulgates Rousseau's theories in a more influential medium, it seems a better target of her analysis than a text such as *The Letter to D'Alembert*. Wollstonecraft's critique focuses both upon passages in *Emile* which inculcate superficial self-consciousness in women, and, more importantly, upon those that instruct others how to 'govern' women through the inculcation of that mechanism. Thus, Rousseau is not merely another writer rambling on about the 'fair sex', but is a theorist of how ideals of modesty can be employed to control women. Accordingly, Wollstonecraft quotes the following passage:

We ought not, therefore, to restrain the prattle of girls, in the same manner as we should that of boys, with that severe question, *To what purpose are you talking?* but by another, which is no less difficult to answer, *How will your discourse be received?* (qtd. in VRW 5.156; *Emilius* 46)

Earlier in *Emile*, Rousseau had made an observation about little girls and their love of 'dress', and he now extrapolates a general principle by which women's speech can be controlled in public. Wollstonecraft responds to this in a passage that casts Rousseau's suggestion as a betrayal of republican principles:

To govern the tongue in this manner must require great address indeed, and it is too much practised both by men and women. Out of the abundance of the heart how few speak! So few that I, who love simplicity, would gladly give up politeness for a quarter of the virtue that has been sacrificed to an

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<sup>109</sup> Allan Bloom argues that the 'true addressees' (*Emile* 481, note) of *Emile* are not parents, but elite readers of political theory. Bloom quotes a letter of Rousseau's in support of this opinion: '[...] it is a new system of education, the plan of which I present for the study of the wise and not a method for fathers and mothers [...]', (from *Letters Written from the Mountain V, Oeuvres Complètes*, 3.783). Bloom agrees with Rousseau that *Emile* was 'meant to rival or supersede' Plato (Bloom, 'Introduction' 4).

equivocal quality which at best should only be the polish of virtue. (VRW 5.156)

Wollstonecraft characterises Rousseau's suggestion as a hypocritical sponsorship of the routines and pressures of polite society, at least for women. The passage rejects 'politeness' as a specific type of social self-consciousness in favour of 'virtue', a characteristic assertion of a republican value. Wollstonecraft's invocation of this principle rejects the gendered double standard that Rousseau has introduced with his 'observations' of little girls. Yet for all her idealization of 'sincerity', this does not mean that Wollstonecraft opposes the mechanism of social self-consciousness as a means of social regulation:

I mean therefore to infer that the society is not properly organized which does not compel men and women to discharge their respective duties by making it the *only* way to acquire that countenance from their fellow-creatures, which every human being wishes some way to attain. (VRW 9.212; my emphasis)

In ridiculing the story of 'O', Wollstonecraft denies that self-consciousness is innate to women alone, but she nevertheless values it as a means of encouraging moral behaviour for both sexes. Wollstonecraft cites a *single* moral standard by which individuals are 'compelled' to right action; she challenges a social vision in which men speak to their own 'purpose', but women must always subordinate themselves to others' opinions.

In Elizabeth Wingrove's account of *The Letter to D'Alembert*, Rousseau did not trust women, or *men*, with a self-regulating moral sense, despite his claims of the 'natural' propensity of boys to be independent of public pressure. Wingrove's argument is that Rousseau's model of the 'natural', pre-social man, delineated in the two *Discourses*, is as artificial and constructed as his model of womanhood. For Wingrove, Rousseau produces 'an equally idealist formulation of natural masculinity' (588). Thus, his insistence on sexual performance in *The Letter to D'Alembert* applies to both sexes. This is a reasonable assumption, given statements such as the following:

But let me be instructed where young marriageable persons will have occasion to get a taste for one another and to see one another with more propriety and circumspection than in a gathering where the eyes of the public

are constantly open and upon them, forcing them to be reserved, modest, and to watch themselves most carefully? (*D'Alembert* 128)

In the town square of Rousseau's ideal small republic, the 'eyes of the public' demand sexual performance and 'modesty' of young people, both male and female. From this perspective, Wingrove wants to revise simplistic judgments of Rousseau's 'misogynist sociobiology' (*D'Alembert* 128), and she may have in mind Okin's well-known interpretation. However, while Wingrove convincingly proves that Rousseau prescribes sexual behaviour for both men and women, she does not address the *extent* to which he expects each sex to be constructed. In both *The Letter to D'Alembert* and in *Emile*, there is a differential treatment of the sexes; women are to be subject to much more restraint through the mechanism which Wollstonecraft terms 'countenance'. Despite the description of the normative function of festivities in the town square, *The Letter to D'Alembert* spends much more time on the dangers of public, critical, intellectual women than on specifically proscribing male speech. Likewise, in *Emile* the function of the 'eyes of the public' is granted to the gaze of the generic male observer, and is directed primarily towards women.

Wollstonecraft identifies a differential construction of gender in Rousseau and claims that Rousseau's deployment of social self-consciousness is gendered while hers is not. Like Rousseau, Wollstonecraft sees social self-consciousness or 'countenance' as natural and even acceptable as a means of social regulation, but disagrees on two key aspects of Rousseau's treatment of this topic. In essence, Rousseau's principle of social self-consciousness, or *amour propre*, which is seen negatively in *The Discourse on the Sciences and Arts*, is redeployed in his later works to organize and regulate the citizens of his republic, but his plan is fundamentally an erotic and a gendered one. In *The Discourse on Inequality*, the very first appearance of *amour propre* in the history of the human race occurs at dances, in which young men and women are attracted to each other and seek to impress.<sup>110</sup> In

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<sup>110</sup> In this context, Rousseau is discussing the emergence of small interdependent societies. One of the first phenomena in this setting is the competition for the attention of the opposite sex. The imagined scenario in which self-consciousness comes to be is a dance:

People grew accustomed to gather in front of their huts or around a large tree: song and dance, true children of love and leisure, became the amusement or rather the occupation of idle men and women who had flocked together. Each one began to look at the others and to want to be looked at himself, and public esteem had a value. The one who sang or danced the

*Emile*, employing naturalist rhetoric, he insists that little girls are easier to govern by means of 'what others will think' simply because it is more natural to them than to freedom-loving boys. Contrary to Rousseau's claim in *Emile*, Wollstonecraft insists that social self-consciousness is not innate to women alone, and can actually be reformed so that admiration of others is grounded on moral, physical, and intellectual accomplishments; in short, upon their 'virtues', as Wollstonecraft understood the term:

A wild wish has just flown from my heart to my head, and I will not stifle it, though it may excite a horse-laugh. I do earnestly wish to see the distinction of sex confounded in society, unless where love animates the behaviour. (VRW 4.126)

Wollstonecraft sees the gendering and exacerbation of a particularly sexual self-consciousness as debilitating to women and suggests, therefore, that it be banished from the civic public. Arguing against Rousseau's equation of publicity with sexual identity, Wollstonecraft presents a utopian concept of a public in which physical appearance is not gendered. At the same time, the final qualification makes some allowance for sexual play in other social spheres. There is ambiguity here as to where 'love' should be pursued, and Wollstonecraft does not say whether it could still be pursued in a separate public place, or a purely private one. However, it is clear that when sexual play is removed from 'society', women themselves remain in public to transact other business. It is the 'discharge of their duties', as in the passage above, which forms the 'only' basis upon which both men and women are distinguished from each other.

This passage is among the most frequently cited in modern Wollstonecraft criticism. The notion of removing 'the distinction of sex' to the private sphere is most often interpreted as reflecting Wollstonecraft's adherence to the republican concept of the disinterested citizen, whose passionate, sexual self is shifted out of the public sphere so that he may practice civic 'virtue'. Andrew McCann argues that the segregation of sexuality and rationality operated not only to segregate individuals, but worked *within* individuals:

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best, the handsomest, the strongest, the most adroit or the most eloquent became the most highly regarded. (*Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* 64)

[M]ales can conduct themselves rationally and heroically in public only if otherwise errant or potentially anarchic passions are bracketed in and relegated to the private, where they are externalized in the female body. (147)

From this perspective, Wollstonecraft's desire to banish 'sexual distinctions' appears to replicate the republican discourse McCann describes here. McCann does not, in fact, suggest that Wollstonecraft is complicit in the displacement of 'anarchic passions', and finally concludes that 'Wollstonecraft's work ultimately exceed[ed] the gendered semiotic of the political culture in which she was herself deeply involved' (149). In contrast, Claudia Johnson sees the gendered male republican ideal as fully constructing Wollstonecraft's politics in *Rights of Woman*. She views Wollstonecraft as rejecting not only traditionally gendered feminine traits, such as sentimentality and physical delicacy, but female sexuality itself. Thus, Johnson claims, Wollstonecraft's advice to women is to become men, at least in public:

*Rights of Woman* is preoccupied with championing a kind of masculinity into which women can be invited rather than with enlarging or inventing a positive discourse of femininity. (24)

Johnson goes on to document Wollstonecraft's impatience with effeminate men and hyperfeminized women. To be sure, Johnson has identified Wollstonecraft's debt to a republican paradigm of male virtue, but she ignores both the specifics of Wollstonecraft's social doctrine and her well-developed critique of the literary transmission of this gendered cultural ideology. Wollstonecraft may indeed want a 'return' to gender identities that have something in common with republican discourse, but it is by no means certain that she has in view the same republican society as those writers with whom Johnson wants to associate her, such as Richard Price or James Burgh. Moreover, her targeting of Milton, Talleyrand, Rousseau, and Barbauld suggests that she is prepared to question precisely those aspects of republican sexual politics that Claudia Johnson sees her as complicit with. As Virginia Sapiro contends, Wollstonecraft's 'extension' of political rights to women could go far beyond an attitude of complicity and ineffectual reform:



In gendered societies, and highly androcentric ones at that, in order to believe women can be added to extant political theory without affecting the remaining structure, one must radically underestimate the importance of gender in political and social life and the centrality of gender and sexuality as a means of understanding self, society, and polity. (294)

Thus, what has been lacking in many accounts of Wollstonecraft's political thinking is that while she aims at a desexualized society as a future ideal, her critique of *current* institutions is very much enabled by an analysis of gender ideology, and its modes of transmission.

Accordingly, *Rights of Woman* opens with a disagreement with a French revolutionary, the first of Wollstonecraft's examples of men who are deeply influenced by Rousseau's social regime. She addresses Talleyrand, an important figure in the old regime and now an influential member of the National Assembly of the new French republic. As a member of the clergy, 'Bishop' Talleyrand had been a deputy for the Second Estate in the Estates General of 1789, and later became a key member of the Girondin administration (Schama 15). Thus Talleyrand can certainly be referred to as a republican thinker, at least in terms of his political commitments at this time and, as we shall see, in terms of his gender ideology.<sup>111</sup> Talleyrand was also an ally of Wollstonecraft's political associates amongst the Dissenters, such as Price and others. In fact, Wollstonecraft, and a group of Dissenters at Hackney, met with him on his trip to England, when he attempted to negotiate with Pitt to prevent Britain from allying itself with Prussia against France (Tomalin 114). The occasion for her mention of Talleyrand is his proposal for national education, which places women firmly outside of the political public. It is important briefly to examine Wollstonecraft's critical approach to Talleyrand, first because it demonstrates that at the start of *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft immediately distinguishes her social doctrine of a politicized domesticity from that of Rousseau and his followers. Second, by counting Talleyrand *among* Rousseau's followers, Wollstonecraft introduces her theory that Rousseau's written works are at the root of the cultural and political ideology that she seeks to reform.

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<sup>111</sup> Simon Schama's history of the French Revolution, *Citizens*, begins and ends with narrativized vignettes of Talleyrand. One of the themes of Schama's history is that Talleyrand's politics shifted considerably with the reinstatement of monarchist government, an attempt to draw an analogy with revolutionary politics.

Talleyrand's educational proposal, the *Rapport sur l'éducation Publique*, was submitted to the National Assembly in late 1791.<sup>112</sup> This is the 'pamphlet' that Wollstonecraft alludes to at the start of the Dedication (Ded.65). Talleyrand's argumentation shows a marked similarity to Rousseau's:

Is it not obvious that their delicate constitution, their peaceful inclinations, the numerous duties of maternity, constantly estrange them from vigorous practices, from painful duties, and call them to gentle occupations, to domestic cares? And how can one fail to see that the guardian principle of Societies, which established harmony in the division of powers, was expressed and as it were revealed by nature, when she thus distributed such obviously distinct duties to the two sexes? (397)

Talleyrand places women in the domestic sphere on the basis of their different 'natures' and insists that the integrity of society, its 'conservation', depends on their exclusion from the public (397). The link to Rousseau's formulation is direct, something substantiated by a recent study of the genesis of the *Rapport*. Charles Steinger traces the early educational proposals of the French republic to *Emile*, noting that Diderot, Condorcet, and Talleyrand publicly cited his work as the inspiration for their schemes for a national education system (Steinger 20-25). Wollstonecraft's response to the notion that domestic duties 'estrange' women from a civic presence is that it is a form of 'tyranny' which the Revolution was meant to reject: 'Do you not act a similar part when you *force* all women, by denying them civil and political rights, to remain immured in their families groping in the dark?' (*VRW* Ded.67). Thus, for Wollstonecraft, the deformation of public gender identities, and the consequent exclusion from the public is not only due to the 'corruptions' of courtly effeminacy, but also to the male desire to dominate females, one that is as readily found in republican traditions as any other.

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<sup>112</sup> Talleyrand's educational plan was presented on 10 September 1791 to the Constituent Assembly, which would dissolve days later without considering it. Another proposal, by Condorcet, which included greater access for the lower classes, was also tabled (Steinger 20).

## 4.2 Anna Laetitia Barbauld and Other Literary Women

Just as the young female reader can be made aware of the process by which she ‘imbibes’ dangerous sentiments, Wollstonecraft’s fellow writers are asked to become conscious of the repressive language in their works. It is for this reason that Wollstonecraft criticizes Anna Laetitia Barbauld for her use of a generic poetic language of gallantry and condescension. Wollstonecraft’s treatment of Barbauld aims to demonstrate how ‘a prevailing opinion of a sexual character’ influences writers and then, according to Wollstonecraft’s mimetic interpretation, appears in their written texts. In Barbauld’s several appearances in *Rights of Woman*, she is noted with respect, but at the start of Chapter 4 Wollstonecraft takes issue with her poem ‘To a Lady, with some painted Flowers’ (1773), finding it unacceptable that Barbauld, as a woman ‘of superior sense’ would write a superficial and gallant dedication likening women to flowers. Her treatment of Barbauld is brief in comparison with the much more extended analyses of male writers. Nevertheless, the critique of Barbauld is significant in its insistence upon a more radicalized public presence for women than what Barbauld and other women writers endorsed at the time. For this reason, it is important to understand the frequently studied interaction between Wollstonecraft and Barbauld in the context of the feminist debate that arose in the 1790s, extending a discussion from Section 1.0 above concerning women critics of the eighteenth century.

Barbauld and Wollstonecraft should have been allies by most reckonings, considering their political affinities as well as their perceived co-membership in an elite group of intellectual women. As is evident in *Rights of Men*, and in Chapter 1 of *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft sympathizes with Barbauld’s defence of her fellow Dissenters, such as Price and Priestley, including their celebration of the French Revolution before 1793. The existence of a vanguard of elite women is frequently noted in this period. The bluestockings, as we have seen in Chapter 1, established and publicized themselves as arbiters of literature and culture. This role was recognized by their contemporaries, judging by the success of their publications and their frequent representations in paintings and sculptures. Two instances were Samuel Butler’s *The Nine Living Muses of Great Britain* (1779), a painting then copied as an engraving for various anthologies of women’s literary works, and the public statues of Catharine Macaulay (Eger, ‘Representing’). In Reeve’s *Progress of Romance*, for instance, there is a constant comparison between a knowledgeable

cohort of intellectual women and the less satisfying writings of male scholars, and the same implication is found in Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall*. The male narrator travels with his nephew, whom he cannot persuade to adopt the principles of self-control and sobriety necessary for a successful public life. In other words, he is tasked with imbuing him with the middle-class virtues, and disabusing him of the attractions of courtly affectation. At the start of the narrative, it is clear that the 'gentleman' has had little impact on his nephew. Ultimately, it is the women of the utopian educational community who are able to bring about the desired transformation, apparent proof of the indispensable mediating role of bluestocking intellectual culture.

Women's writing had been involved with national politics in explicit ways from at least mid-century onwards, and in the later period this involvement in itself became a highly politicized issue. As we have seen in Chapter 1, Elizabeth Montagu enclosed a nationalistic theme within her literary critical comparisons of Shakespeare and French writers. Catharine Macaulay's *History*, with its republican reading of seventeenth-century English history, was only the latest in a series of revisionist and partisan works. As Susan Wiseman tells us, Macaulay's work was at first celebrated as an effective Whig rebuttal to Hume's *History*, which was much more sympathetic to the Stuarts, but fell out of favour in the 1780s, when many Whig politicians sought to distance themselves from the growing radical movement (181-83). In the contentious atmosphere of the 1790s, the social role of literary women was understood to have direct correlation to a specific political orientation. It was not merely *what* these women wrote, but the fact that they wrote publicly and explicitly about politics that identified them.

In George Dyer's 'Ode to Liberty', Wollstonecraft is amongst a vanguard of political writers which includes Milton, Price, *Mrs. Jebb*, Catharine Macaulay, as well as Anna Laetitia Barbault.

Or dost thou, sweet enthusiast! Choose to warm  
With more than manly fire the female breast?

And urge thy Wollstonecraft to break the charm,  
Where beauty lies in durance vile opprest?  
Then will I from my Jebb's fair pages prove,  
That female minds might teach a patriot throng. (36)

Here Dyer refers to the writings of John Jebb's widow, proof of 'female merit'. Aside from the gendering of liberty and the gallant attitude towards republican ladies, this is an example of the homogenizing canon-building of the commonwealthmen, discussed in Chapter 2. In Dyer's eagerness to construct a literary juggernaut, he ignores Wollstonecraft's differences with Milton. Nevertheless, Dyer acknowledges the connection which Wollstonecraft makes between politics writ large and the more particularly feminist argument against institutionalized forms of repression. In a footnote, Dyer paraphrases a theme of *Rights of Woman*: 'The truth is the modes of education and the customs of society are degrading to the female character' (n.36). Dyer's enthusiastic evocation of female consensus is belied by some of the women on his roll call, who see substantial differences amongst themselves concerning both the politics of 'liberty', and the gender politics of public self-representation.

By the end of the century, the differences between major women writers had become more pronounced, as an exchange between Maria Edgeworth and Barbauld makes clear. On 22 July 1804, Edgeworth writes the following to Barbauld:

I proceed to mention a scheme of my father's. He thinks that a periodical paper, to be written entirely by ladies, would succeed, and we wish that all the literary ladies of the present day might be invited to take a share in it. — No papers to be rejected— each to be signed by the initial of the author's name —each to be inserted in the order in which it is received. (qtd. in Le Breton 84-85)<sup>113</sup>

Edgeworth qualifies her proposal with the reassurance that contributions would be catalogued generically, by name and numerical order. Her suggestion that the proposed periodical would limit editorial intervention displays an awareness of a contentious and partisan literary field. Barbauld's response, on 4 September, indicates that differences of skill and of political commitment cannot be so easily wished away:

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<sup>113</sup> Some of the modern transcriptions of this exchange do not quote the exchange between Edgeworth and Barbauld in full, nor do they frequently note Edgeworth's persistence over the course of several letters, nor Barbauld's various suggestions for limiting the scope of the proposed ladies' periodical. These exchanges are presented more fully in Le Breton's and in Oliver's late nineteenth-century memoirs than they are in the earlier memoir by Lucy Aikin, or in many later treatments.



All the literary ladies! Mercy on us! Have you ever reckoned up how many there are, or computed how much trash, and how many discordant materials would be poured in from such a general invitation. (qtd. in Le Breton 85-91)

Apparently Edgeworth's plan for an equitable treatment would not go far enough in managing the resulting cacophony of political positions and talents. Considering the huge numbers of literary women and the disparity in their abilities, a general 'lady's paper' would be unfeasible. More problematic, however, are the political differences: 'Mrs Hannah More would not write along with you or me, and we should probably hesitate at joining Miss Hays, or if she were living, Mrs Godwin'. Edgeworth persists with several more letters before giving up her attempts at persuading Barbauld (Oliver 204-07). Barbauld rejects a female collectivity because 'different connections separate them much more than the joint interest of their sex would unite them' (Oliver 204-07).

Barbauld's image of a continuum, with herself at the centre and More and Wollstonecraft (Mrs Godwin) at either end, illustrates that the political stances of these women were well-established by this time, and it is their political stances which identify them rather than their skill in writing. Although Barbauld raises two criteria in her letter to Edgeworth, talent and political 'connection', the writers mentioned are distinguished by the latter. Ultimately, Barbauld's concern is with the way in which women writers would appear to the public. If the publication bore the word 'Ladys' on its title page, there would be expectations of 'frivolity and romance'. She sees this expectation as 'unreasonable' but as an unavoidable reality of print culture, so much so that any woman who appeared in this journal would be 'writing in trammels', and her text judged according to the sex of its author rather than for its content: 'There is a great difference between a paper written by a lady, and as a lady'. This implies that the choices that Barbauld had made until this point in her career were calculated to avoid the latter characterization.<sup>114</sup>

The issue of self-representation of literary women was a central concern. This is apparent, as Anne K. Mellor has indicated, in the self-conscious declarations made

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<sup>114</sup> In *Mary Hays (1759-1843): The Growth of a Woman's Mind* (2006), Gina Luria Walker deals extensively with the theme of political differentiation between Hannah More, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Mary Hays.

by any number of women writers throughout the 1790s regarding where they stand in relation to each other, and in relation to Wollstonecraft herself. Three years prior to her letter to Barbauld, Maria Edgeworth, in *Letters for Literary Ladies*, found it necessary to declare that she was not 'a champion for the rights of woman' (45). However, the opening section of this educational text dramatizes her own struggle against her father to become a 'literary lady'. She paraphrases a purported set of letters between Thomas Day and her father, in which the latter discourages the education of his friend's precocious daughter (5). In this narrativized setting, Edgeworth pits male prejudice against the right of women to realize their intellectual potential. However, she will not go so far as to suggest that public literary women should deviate from feminine 'propriety' (35). Perhaps in an allusion to Wollstonecraft, Edgeworth rejects intellectual women who want 'precedency out of their own domains' (36). This suggests that, like More, Edgeworth sees Wollstonecraft's (and Mary Hays's) choice of explicitly political genres as improper.

In *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex* (1798), Priscilla Bell Wakefield, the Quaker educational writer and philanthropist, also takes pains to distinguish herself from Wollstonecraft. At the start, she seems to share some feminist principles with Wollstonecraft. She stresses the spiritual equality of men and women, the latter who 'possess the same qualities as men, though perhaps in a different degree' (2). Wakefield also states that women ought to be able to support themselves economically when necessary (65-67), but she parts company with Wollstonecraft on two key points. First, Wakefield declares that wives must submit to their husbands' superior judgment, and makes an extended argument on this point (55-75). Second, Wakefield maintains a strictly gendered division between public men and public women:

Whatever obliges them to mix in the public haunts of men, or places the young in too familiar a situation with the other sex; whatever is obnoxious to the delicacy and reserve of the female character, or destructive, in the smallest degree, to the strictest moral purity, is inadmissible. (9)

Wakefield's declarations can be viewed either as necessary strategies by which to enter the public debate on women's education or as ways of simply delineating the respective stances of these writers concerning the 'woman question' – or both. As we

have seen, modern scholars such as Betty A. Schellenberg and Lawrence E. Klein, whose focus is more upon women at mid-century, propose that women writers employed various strategies by which to become active participants in public debate. Judging by the commentary by Barbauld and Edgeworth later in the century, the issue has become not whether women enter public dialogue, but how they do so. It is apparent that Wollstonecraft's negative reputation made it necessary for literary women to offer explicit declarations of their stances concerning their own publicity.

Other women of this time declared their alliance with Wollstonecraft. Mary Hays, the Dissenter and self-educated intellectual, wrote a series of texts which coincided with the feminist principles in Wollstonecraft's work. Her *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women* (1798) employs similar spiritual and rational principles to argue for women's political rights and unencumbered participation in the public sphere. Hays states that her text was planned previous to 1792 (Mellor 144). As a question of textual history, this may be disputed, but more important is the self-definition which this claim embodies. Hays's statement illuminates the willingness of an intellectual woman to declare a political stance in public, grounded simply on conviction and erudition. Thus, whereas some modern assessments see Hays as distancing herself from her mentor and increasingly unpopular political associate, Hays makes a radical virtue of her independence from Wollstonecraft. Hays's stance is still in strong contrast to the careful proscriptions of women's public status, such as we have seen in Edgeworth's *Letters to Literary Ladies*, and certainly those of Hannah More. Mary Robinson's feminist treatise, *A Letter to the Women of England on the Injustice of Mental Subordination* (1799), clearly argues both for the free exercise of philosophical and political opinion by women in public, and for concrete political functions: 'How comes it, that in this age of reason we do not see statesmen and orators selecting women of superior mental acquirements as their associates?' (46). For Robinson, women's intellectual activities are clearly proscribed by male prejudice: 'Man says you *may* read, and you *will* think; but you shall not evince your knowledge, or employ your thoughts, beyond the boundaries which we have set up around you' (78). That is to say, it is not enough that women read and become educated, as was already allowable, but they must be able to apply their intelligence beyond gendered spheres of action.

Thus, the 'feminist' debate of the 1790s centred not only upon substantive issues of civil and legal standing, but also on the very 'right' to make an explicitly political case in print. In a study of Barbauld's political and theological writing, Harriet Guest argues that even as Barbauld develops a conception of a public sphere with political potential, she is complicit with women's exclusion from the public sphere (59). Guest's critique was long ago prefigured by Wollstonecraft, who faults Barbauld for her depiction of a separate 'empire' for women (*VRW* n.4.123), and likewise sets Barbauld within a politicized literary context.

Like Barbauld, Wollstonecraft presupposes the existence of a female elite, and has thoughts about the roles of such women:

'[T]hough I consider that women in the common walks of life are called to fulfil the duties of wives and mothers, by religion and reason, I cannot help lamenting that women of a superior cast have not a road open by which they can pursue more extensive plans of usefulness and independence'. (*VRW* 9.217)

This comment reveals other problems, not the least of which is the possible essentialism inherent in her assumption that most women are suited to domesticity, a stance that I analyse below. Like Barbauld, Wollstonecraft does not call for a political or even literary collective of women, but she does appear to have specific ideas about what intellectual women ought to write. Mary Poovey, as we have seen above, laments the lack of a collective feminist consciousness in Wollstonecraft, but neglects to document Wollstonecraft's political harangue of fellow literary women such as Barbauld. With regard to her dispute with Barbauld in Chapter 4, Wollstonecraft suggests that the role of intellectual women is, at the very least, to resist the 'supposed sexual character' inculcated by a male literary tradition (*VRW* 4.122), which can always be traced back to Rousseau and 'a numerous list of male writers' (*VRW* 9.215).

When Wollstonecraft claims that Barbauld 'adopt[s] the same sentiments' found in 'the language of men', she bases her claim on literary evidence, which is promptly supplied in her footnotes.<sup>115</sup> As we have seen in Chapter 3 of this thesis,

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<sup>115</sup> Wollstonecraft is quoting from a later edition of this poem. The original, published by Joseph Johnson in 1773 is titled 'To a Lady, with painted Flowers', and editions after the third include 'some' in the title. My references here are to the sixth edition, or 'New Edition' published by Johnson in 1792, the copy most likely that Wollstonecraft had at hand, or that was inserted directly by Johnson,

Wollstonecraft can use the footnote to substantiate an argument parallel with the main text (cf. 165-70). Barbauld's poem displays affinities with the gallant and degrading language of courtly love poetry. In the last stanza, flowers are anthropomorphised into a 'family', which, in this case, refers to the gendered category of women, who are distinguished from men not only by their beauty, but also by their distinct and separate social roles:

*But this soft family, to cares unknown,  
Were born for pleasure and delight ALONE  
Gay without toil, and lovely without art,  
They spring to CHEER the sense, and GLAD the heart.  
Nor blush, my fair, to own you copy these;  
Your BEST, your SWEETEST empire is – TO PLEASE.  
(VRW 4.123; Wollstonecraft's emphases; Barbauld 96-97)*

This poem, in Wollstonecraft's view, 'adopt[s]' a male idiom, one which 'classes the brown and the fair with the smiling flowers that only adorn the land' (4.123). Wollstonecraft's distinction between women of different types is in contrast to the iconic image of women that is characterized by utter passivity. Flowers may be beautiful, but lowly and mute. Wollstonecraft's point is that 'women of superior sense', such as Barbauld, ought to know better than to reproduce either the form or the substance of male prescriptions concerning women. Wollstonecraft accounts for Barbauld's capitulation as a fear of 'departing from a supposed sexual character'. Ultimately, cultural norms of femininity, which Wollstonecraft believes owe much to the writings of men such as Rousseau, appear in women's writing *as* the 'language of men'.

The visual appearance of Barbauld's poem is also a significant aspect of Wollstonecraft's critique, another parameter of a fully developed literary critical apparatus. As in the Milton critique, the target text is scored over with paratextual intervention in the form of italics; the capitals indicate a double emphasis. The capitalisation of the word 'ALONE' indicates that Wollstonecraft objects to the idea that women's sole function is 'TO PLEASE'. Wollstonecraft's double emphasis on the superlative adjectives, 'BEST' and 'SWEETEST' are also significant; apparently,

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judging by the fact that the capitalisation and punctuation in *Rights of Woman* is identical to the 1792 edition of Barbauld's poem, but not the addition of emphases.



Barbauld does not simply prescribe the commonplace behaviours of a submissive, companionate femininity, but she does so in *comparison* to competing models of womanhood, presumably those which recommend greater autonomy. That is why the 'Lady' is told not to be concerned that she 'copies' this model of behaviour. Joseph Johnson published a new edition of Barbauld's works in the same year as *Rights of Woman*. This poem appears on two successive pages of Barbauld's book without emphases of any kind. Even though Johnson most likely had the plates available from his earlier printings (1773, 1774, and 1776), in *Rights of Woman* the poem was typeset on a single page, apparently to accommodate Wollstonecraft's interventions.<sup>116</sup> John Carroll's study of italicization in Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* supports a view of this procedure as part of print culture at this time. Richardson as alleged editor of found letters, already a more mediating role than if he had simply claimed authorship, uses the footnote to signal 'his readers to a halt and proceeds to discourse on the correct interpretation of what the characters are doing and saying' (61). The authority of this 'editor' is augmented by his inclusion of allusions to other texts. Carroll argues that the 'curious' effect of frequent allusions is to 'reduce' all authors to the 'familiar and domestic' (67). The same may be said of *Rights of Woman*, whose intertextual density grants authority to Wollstonecraft and implicitly makes even 'great' or 'respectable' authors equally subject to her criticism, and by extension, to the criticism of a female readership.

It is not enough that 'women of superior sense' should improve themselves both physically and mentally;<sup>117</sup> Wollstonecraft insists that these women must consistently present an active ideal of womanhood in their writings. Wollstonecraft not only rejects the symbolization of women as passive entities, but also focuses upon the passivity of a writer who would employ a genre associated with gallant male language. Wollstonecraft's fellow educator must not adopt the 'language of men', and even routine dedicatory verse has now become the target of an acute feminist

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<sup>116</sup> Page 113 in the second edition of *Rights of Woman* (1792), corrected by Wollstonecraft.

<sup>117</sup> In Chapter 3, Wollstonecraft's vision of a female elite includes physical accomplishments:

I will [...] affirm, as an indisputable fact, that most of the women, in the circle of my observation, who have acted like rational creatures, or shown any vigour of intellect, have accidentally been allowed to run wild [...]. (VRW 3.112)

critique. As I have argued in the previous chapter with regard to Gary Kelly's account of the 'generic hybridity' in *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft's point is that any genre is capable of being a vehicle of dangerous rhetoric. The literary ideal she is espousing here is one in which the writer has enough control over her text not to allow it to become a reflection of routine prescriptions phrased in a conventional generic language. In other words, Wollstonecraft insists on greater intentionality on the part of the author. Just as she has distinguished between two versions of sensibility in the reader, one which operates without the intervention of the will, and one which is tempered by reason, she now demands a writing practice which is more fully conscious of its feminist implications.

Wollstonecraft's approach here is an advance upon her earlier reviews, which dealt with individual texts. Barbauld's poem is not presented in *Rights of Woman* as an anecdotal case of misguided writing but as symptomatic of a broad ideology. Wollstonecraft's treatment of Barbauld goes further than her critiques of women in the reviews for the *Analytical*. Her choice of target is significant, as it is in the case of Gregory. Wollstonecraft might have chosen C. Smith or Helen Maria Williams, or other writers with whom she was familiar, but instead chooses a woman who was part of Joseph Johnson's cohort, and whose works were being published alongside her own. Wollstonecraft employs the literary critical criterion we have also seen in the literary reviews, demanding originality and an avoidance of supposedly superficial genres such as the anecdote and, in this case, the light dedication. Now, however, these criteria are in the service of Wollstonecraft's feminist agenda, and it is not enough that Barbauld is an ally; she is assessed by her orientation to the ideal of female intellectual autonomy.

Another example of Wollstonecraft's concern with the role of literary women is her treatment of Mme. de Staël, the French *salonnière* and novelist and supporter of the Revolution. In Chapter 5, Wollstonecraft comments on de Staël's *Letters on the Works and Character of J.J. Rousseau* (1788):

Her [de Staël's] eulogium on Rousseau was accidentally put into my hands, and her sentiments, the sentiments of too many of my sex, may serve as the text for a few comments. 'Though Rousseau,' she observes, 'has endeavoured to prevent women from interfering in public affairs, and acting a brilliant part in the theatre of politics: yet in speaking of them, how much has he done it to their satisfaction!' (*VRW* 5.172; de Staël 15)

Wollstonecraft had reviewed this text in 1789 (*AnRev* 136-37). There, de Staël was a 'warm panegyrist' and in *Rights of Woman* a 'rhapsodist' (5.172). Wollstonecraft's comments on de Staël, which come after the critique of Gregory, suggest that the celebrity of a text amongst even respectable women is not a positive recommendation; rather it is cause for concern. de Staël's adulation of Rousseau reflects 'the sentiments of too many of my sex' (5.172). Instead, de Staël ought to consider Rousseau's domestic doctrine more critically. In section four of Chapter 5, which briefly reviews women's educational writing, Wollstonecraft argues that Madame de Staël has allowed Rousseau's gallantry to euphemise a bad political bargain. In the quotation supplied by Wollstonecraft, de Staël goes on to argue that women are meant 'by nature' to occupy a 'throne' of domesticity and romantic intimacy, a set of sentiments which apparently reflect Rousseau's own doctrine (qtd. in 5.172).

De Staël's approval of Rousseau appears in 1788, in the context of revolutionary politics, but in 1800, when de Staël returns to the issue of gendered social spheres, her position has shifted. The title of *On Literature Considered in its Relationship to Social Institutions* (1800) already confirms de Staël's more explicitly politicized literary criticism, and in the section entitled 'On Women Writers' she discusses the fate of public literary women in monarchies and in republics. In absolutist culture, she argues, women could have public roles, but public *literary* fame was another matter: 'Women were certainly allowed to sacrifice household occupations to a love of society and its pleasures; serious study, however, was condemned as pedantic' ('On Literature' 606). Up to this point in the text, de Staël follows the typical republican line which condemns the public women of absolutist culture, whose public lives cause them to neglect 'household occupations'. This is unacceptable because it is 'generally preferable for women to devote themselves to the household virtues' (605). However, when de Staël comes to consider 'republics', she no longer accepts Rousseau's compact, in which women trade off direct involvement in civic matters, which include literary activities, for the indirect political power they allegedly have through their influence upon their husbands. In fact, republican culture as it has actually unfolded has left women in perhaps worse conditions. '[E]ver since the Revolution men have deemed it politically and morally useful to

reduce women to a state of the most absurd mediocrity' (de Staël 606). The English are no better, for if the French adopted their feminine ideal, women would 'read nothing, know nothing and become incapable of carrying on a conversation' (606-67). Although hyperbolic, these thoughts constitute a shift from her acquiescence to Rousseau's romanticization of the domestic woman twelve years earlier. What has not changed over the dozen intervening years, however, is the awareness of Rousseau's contribution to this aspect of republican ideology.

De Staël's realization that republican politics may not have made substantial gains as far as women are concerned is already a concern in *Rights of Woman*, and it is Rousseau's compensatory domestic bargain which is at the root of the problem. Wollstonecraft quotes the relevant passage from *Emile*:

The superiority of address, peculiar to the female sex, is a very equitable indemnification for their inferiority in point of strength: without this, woman would not be the companion of man, but his slave: it is by her superior art and ingenuity that she preserves her equality, and governs him while she affects to obey. (qtd. in *VRW* 5.154; *Emilius*)

Wollstonecraft quotes from *Emile* in order to specify Rousseau's offer to women to remain at home in exchange for power. Her mention of de Staël and of Barbauld is meant to be evidence that women have either succumbed to the image of public femininity that Rousseau has helped to build, or, worse, have endorsed a bad bargain, one which promises domestic power in exchange for their exit from the public.

The insertion of Barbauld's poem and the mention of de Staël serves to reinforce Wollstonecraft's theoretical point that 'a stream of public opinion' works generationally and influences all readers and writers, so that 'even women of superior sense adopt the same sentiments' as male writers (*VRW* 4.122; my emphasis). Later in the 1790s, other women writers felt the need to distance themselves from Wollstonecraft's positions, as we have seen, but 1792 is still early in the 'feminist/anti-feminist' debate. At this point, Wollstonecraft's quarrel is not primarily with women writers. While women such as Barbauld and de Staël are useful to in Wollstonecraft's demonstration of the normative power of 'a prevailing female character' over even the strongest women, they are not the primary authors of 'a supposed sexual character'. Whether the writer is the benevolent and paternal Gregory or a fellow woman writer, and whether the genre is the dedicatory poem, the



educational novel/treatise, or the fond advice of a dying man in the form of a conduct book, the problem is the permanence of social prescriptions that restrict women. These, however, have been created and sustained by a tradition of male writing, one which begins with Moses, is found in Milton, and then receives its most complete doctrinal and rhetorical expression in Rousseau. It is to the latest exponent of this tradition that Wollstonecraft turns when she critiques John Gregory.

### **4.3 Wollstonecraft's Critique of John Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters***

#### **4.3.1 A Rhetoric of Organization**

It is as a perpetuator of Rousseau's 'opinions' that John Gregory first appears in *Rights of Woman*. He is one of 'the male writers who have followed his steps', and is thus embedded firmly in the same canon of repressive writing (2.96). The concept of a canon was being reinforced by an increase in compilations, reprints, critical studies, and the digest functions of the periodicals. In a sense, the tradition of writers to whom Wollstonecraft referred, in essence comprising approximately a century of educational literature, was appearing simultaneously. The wide range of books being reprinted at this time was reflected in the table of contents of anthologies such as *The Female Reader* and *The Speaker*, and included conduct books from the late seventeenth century, selections from the *Spectator*, the 'beauties' of Rousseau, and earlier educational works by Chapone and others – in short, a constant reiteration, and refinement, of an eighteenth-century educational canon. Thus, the permanence and ubiquity of prescriptive writing which Wollstonecraft alludes to throughout *Rights of Woman* was materially present in contemporary print culture, and was immediately available to her readers.

Wollstonecraft's statements linking Gregory with Rousseau come immediately after the treatment of Milton, in what is essentially a prefatory section to Chapters 2 through 5. In the pages following the end of the Milton critique, Wollstonecraft makes several statements which solidify the concept of a contentious canon, and the manner in which male writers 'from Moses' onward have used 'invention', that is,



writing, to accompany the brute ‘strength’ that man has used to ‘subjugate his companion’ (VRW 2.95). Wollstonecraft names the central principle which these writers share with Rousseau, the inculcation in women of ‘the great art of pleasing’ (VRW 2.97). She notes Gregory’s participation in this ‘prevailing opinion’, one which he does not question or resist: ‘The worthy Dr Gregory fell into a similar error. I respect his heart, but entirely disapprove of his celebrated *Legacy to his Daughters*’ (VRW 2.97). The connection of Gregory to Rousseau here foreshadows the critique that comes nearly 150 pages later (in the 1792 edition).

Wollstonecraft’s argument is strengthened through the structuring of Chapters 2 through 5.<sup>118</sup> After the two introductory sections, the Dedication to Talleyrand and the general Introduction, Chapter 1 is a more general political essay, in which the feminist aim of the text is not mentioned explicitly. Therefore, Chapter 2, which opens with the critique of Milton, is the proper start of Wollstonecraft’s central theme. Upon completing the Milton critique Wollstonecraft gives the outline of her intended plan, postponing the close textual analysis of Rousseau and Gregory to a later point in the text:

When I come to that division of the subject, I shall advert to the passages that I more particularly disapprove of, in the works of the authors I have just alluded to; but it is first necessary to observe that my objection extends to the whole purport of those books, which tend, in my opinion, to degrade one-half of the human species, and render women pleasing at the expense of every solid virtue. (2.91)

The intervening material, ‘the whole purport of those books’, is a discussion of the question of ‘natural’ sexual difference in Chapter 3, and then, in Chapter 4, an analysis of how a particularly eroticized identity is inculcated in women. Repeated modern claims that *Rights of Woman* is disorganized must be challenged not only on the basis of this declaration at the start of Wollstonecraft’s plan. We should also consider how Chapters 2 through 4 are structured in order to increase the impact of the literary reviews which essentially constitute Chapter 5, and particularly so that Wollstonecraft can engage with Gregory after having established certain theoretical principles. Chapter 2 states that a ‘female character’ is inculcated through a tradition

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<sup>118</sup> In many studies of *Rights of Woman*, there is the assumption that the work is disorganized. One speculative notion is that her repressed sexuality ‘erupted’ in a fragmented text (Brody 70; cf. 2).

of male writing, and here Gregory's *Legacy* is cited or alluded to half a dozen times: He is foremost amongst 'all the writers who have written on the subject of female education' (2.91). Gregory 'follows in his [Rousseau's] steps' (2.96) by agreeing that the aim of female education is 'to render them [women] pleasing' (2.96). He is also mentioned in connection with Rousseau's suggestions that wives ought to hide any sexual desire for their husbands, and that single women ought to hide their natural 'appetites'. Wollstonecraft calls this practice a '[v]oluptuous precaution, as ineffectual as absurd' (2.98). Gregory is cited again as attempting to inculcate these practices through 'advice', rather than allowing 'experience' to run its course; 'experience will banish what advice can never make us cease to wish for' (2.101). Her final mention of Gregory in Chapter 2 is an attack on the notion of separate educational practices for men and women, who ought to be seen together as 'moral beings' which comprise a 'whole species' (2.101).

Chapter 3 of *Rights of Woman*, as we have seen, engages Rousseau's purported essentialism through a contentious anthological practice, in which Wollstonecraft compares passages from *Emile* with Day's *Sandford and Merton*, and with two of her own embedded samples in the genre of the novelized moral tale. Having established that physical differences between the sexes are less significant than commonly believed, Wollstonecraft devotes Chapter 4 to an analysis of how women's indisputable claim to civil status has come to be obscured. Accordingly, Chapter 4 begins by reasserting that physical differences are irrelevant to the establishment of civil status for women: 'That woman is naturally, or degraded by a concurrence of circumstances, is, I think, clear' (4.121). Wollstonecraft's point is that the only thing obstructing women's rights is the sexualisation of their public identity. It is for this reason that Wollstonecraft takes issue with Barbauld's characterization of women as flowers, a sexual image. Once Wollstonecraft has established her two central principles, that differences between the sexes are constructed by male writers, and that these are precisely what is preventing women from attaining their full social status, Wollstonecraft can move on to the promised close readings of those 'passages' which 'degrade' women, namely the set of five literary reviews which constitute Chapter 5 of *Rights of Woman*.

Chapter 5, divided into five subsections, comprises in effect three literary reviews of individual authors, and two literary surveys. It begins with a review of *Emile*,

which quotes approximately 6,000 words from the text, interspersed with some critical commentary. This is followed by a review of James Fordyce's conduct books, *Sermons to Young Women* (1765) and *The Character and Conduct of the Female Sex* (1776). Section three discusses John Gregory. Section four is a survey of women authors such as Hester Chapone, Hester Thrale Piozzi, and Madame Genlis. The last section begins with Chesterfield and contains a parody of Samuel Johnson's 'The Vanity of Human Wishes'. Here, Wollstonecraft encourages life experience rather than seeing the world exclusively through 'the medium of books' (5.179).<sup>119</sup> Wollstonecraft's brief foreword to Chapter 5 indicates that the key criteria, or 'principles', by which she expects the reader to judge Rousseau, 'might have been deduced from what' she has 'already said' (175). This refers the reader to the beginning of her engagement with *Emile* in Chapter 2, immediately after the end of the Milton critique, and confirms the organizational integrity of the first half of *Rights of Woman*.

#### 4.3.2 Fame and Literary Influence

From a rhetorical point of view, it is useful for Wollstonecraft to defer a direct engagement with the text of *A Father's Legacy* until Chapter 5 because she intends to make an association that may have been jarring to her readers. A cautious view of Rousseau was already prevalent amongst many Dissenters and radicals, as we have seen in Chapter 3, while Gregory's *Legacy* was widely regarded as an uncontroversial and particularly benevolent tract. At first, Wollstonecraft reaffirms these prevalent perceptions, but only in order to eventually prove that a literary tradition of repressive 'male' writing reproduces itself inexorably, despite apparent differences in particular authors. In this view, the popular approval of a text is questioned, that is, fame itself is problematized and becomes a parameter of a literary critique. Wollstonecraft's emphasis on this aspect is evident in one of her first

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<sup>119</sup> Wollstonecraft does not mention Samuel Johnson by name, but the start of her brief parody of 'The Vanity of Human Wishes' is allusive. Johnson opens with 'Let Observation with extensive view, / Survey Mankind, from China to Peru', while Wollstonecraft starts off with 'Let me now as from an eminence survey the world stripped of all delusive charms'. This connection is not noted in the Todd and Butler edition, but Stephen Blakemore mentions it in a study of allusions in *Rights of Woman* (460-61).

mentions of his 'celebrated' work, and in the opening line of the critique in section three of Chapter 5: 'Such paternal solicitude pervades Dr Gregory's *Legacy to his Daughters*, that I enter on the task of criticism with affectionate respect' (VRW 2.97; 5.166). Wollstonecraft's concern with literary celebrity as a means of influence upon women is also evident in her comments on a much less 'respectable' writer, James Fordyce, who appears just previously to Gregory:

As these volumes are so frequently put into the hands of young people, I have taken more notice of them than, strictly speaking, they deserve; but as they have contributed to vitiate the taste, and enervate the understanding of many of my fellow-creatures, I could not pass them silently over. (VRW 5.166)

Wollstonecraft refers here to *Sermons to Young Women* (1765). If not for Fordyce's impact upon young women's education, claims Wollstonecraft, the poor quality of his writing would have excluded him from consideration. We have seen this rhetorical gesture in Clara Reeve's *Progress of Romance*, in which she begrudgingly acknowledges her predecessors' popularity while questioning their scholarship or even their moral acceptability, as in the cases of James Warton and Delarivier Manley respectively (ix-xi; I.119).

Fordyce is a useful preface to the critique of Gregory. Like Barbauld, Fordyce is yet another example of a self-reproducing 'male' tradition: 'In declamatory periods Dr Fordyce spins out Rousseau's eloquence; and in most sentimental rant, details his opinions respecting the female character' (VRW 5.163). As material proof of Fordyce's debt to Rousseau, Wollstonecraft then offers a particularly extreme example of Fordyce's purple prose, adding that 'he shall speak for himself', which demonstrates an self-consciousness of her critical practice of quotation. Yet the implied claim of objectivity is disingenuous because Wollstonecraft has selected a passage which puts Fordyce in quite a bad light:

Behold these smiling innocents, whom I have graced with my fairest gifts, and committed to your protection; [...] They are frail; oh, do not take advantage of their weakness! Let their fears and blushes endear them. Let their confidence in you never be abused. But is it possible, that any of you can be such barbarians, so supremely wicked, as to abuse it? Can you find in your hearts to despoil the gentle, trusting creatures of their treasure, or do anything to strip them of their native robe of virtue? (qtd. in VRW 5.163; Fordyce 82-83)



Wollstonecraft's claim of Fordyce's 'lasciviousness' seems amply demonstrated here, a passage which contains the gallant tones she disapproved of in Barbauld, as well as visual enactments of just the sort of erotic attitude that Fordyce affects to oppose. But while Wollstonecraft has essentially caricatured the prose style as pompous and superficial, her quotations of choice samples are indeed concrete illustrations of Rousseau's lasting influence upon contemporary advice literature.

The celebrity of Gregory's *Legacy* is well established in Wollstonecraft's earlier work, and as an experienced professional reviewer she would have known the print market well. If we accept Mary Waters's claim that Wollstonecraft also had editorial duties in Johnson's commercial projects, this would further confirm Wollstonecraft's knowledge of the print market and of the public status of *A Father's Legacy*. In Wollstonecraft's reviews, at least those from 1788-90, Gregory is mentioned as a standard against which other writers are judged. One example is the following from Gregory's appearance in *The Analytical Review* (1789):

These letters, addressed, by permission, to the queen, appear to be written by a worthy divine; though the reader will not find any important advice which Dr Gregory, Mrs Chapone, Lady Pennington, Dr Fordyce, etc. have enforced in a more elegant manner.<sup>120</sup> (*AnRev* 207)

Wollstonecraft here disparages *Letters to a Young Lady* (1789) by the Rev. John Bennett on account of its routine advice. By contrast, Gregory is among the more commendable authors of conduct books. The inclusion of Fordyce also illustrates a contrast between Wollstonecraft's earlier commentary and that of *Rights of Woman*.

In *The Female Reader*, attributed to Wollstonecraft, a quotation from another work by Gregory heads the main text:

As the two sexes have very different parts to act in life, Nature has marked their characters very differently, in a way that best qualifies them to fulfil their respective duties in society. (qtd. in *Female Reader* 4.67; *Comparative View* 117)

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<sup>120</sup> Lady Pennington was the author of *An Unfortunate Mother's Advice to her Absent Daughters, in a Letter to Miss Pennington* (1761).



This is taken from Gregory's *A Comparative View of the state and faculties of man with those of the animal world* (1766), a work in the historical genre of conjectural history, such as that of Rousseau or of Scottish Enlightenment historiography. The brevity and positioning of this passage gives it the character of an epigraph.<sup>121</sup> The idea of complementary and innate female qualities as justification for women's social roles, placed at the head of this anthology, suggests that the texts within this collection are all in one way or another consonant with this view. Although I dispute the attribution of this collection to Wollstonecraft, as I explain in the appendix, the prominent placement of Gregory at the start of this collection confirms his status in print culture.

In *Rights of Woman*, Gregory's fame becomes the object of scrutiny, and is seen as symptomatic of prevailing beliefs. Wollstonecraft's reiterations of the public status of both Gregory and Rousseau in *Rights of Woman* are important to her rhetoric, which links these two writers on the basis of their ideology. By seeing celebrity as a suspect criterion, Wollstonecraft also reiterates the principle of the independent female reader resistant to public opinion. When Wollstonecraft finally returns to Gregory in Chapter 5 of *Rights of Woman*, it is after a well-grounded critique of other examples of ill-deserved literary fame.

Vivien Jones has written that in the juxtaposition of Fordyce and Gregory, which illuminates obvious differences in prose style, Wollstonecraft appeals to a 'refined taste', a reading posture which is 'inseparable from moral and intellectual improvement' (137). From this point of view, the earlier reviews can be seen as encouraging aesthetic readings which later become the basis for political readings. Jones sees the inclusion of Fordyce as highlighting Wollstonecraft's respect for the more worthy Gregory, whom Wollstonecraft supposedly has more trouble resisting. On the contrary, rather than bolster Gregory's image by a comparison, Wollstonecraft includes Fordyce in order to prove that a heterogeneous group of writers can equally be associated with Rousseau. The placement of Fordyce in Section two of Chapter 5, between Rousseau and Gregory, is also a paratextual strategy. This placement both illustrates the ideological connections between Rousseau and Gregory and follows the chronology of their respective works.

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<sup>121</sup> As seen in the previous chapter, the *Critical Review* prefaces its review of *Emile* with a similarly epigraphic statement of essentialism (15: 21).

A passage early in the critique of Gregory has very similar wording to the conclusion of the critique of Fordyce

[A]s this little volume has many attractions to recommend it to the notice of the most respectable part of my sex, I cannot silently pass over arguments that so speciously support opinions which, I think, have had the most baneful effect on the morals and manners of the female world. (*VRW* 5.166; cf. 17)

This is a reiteration of the theme of dangerous celebrity, and the phrase 'I cannot silently pass over' is an inversion of the nearly identical 'I could not pass them [Fordyce's *Sermons*] silently over', which concluded the previous critique. Gregory's popularity with women readers, like Fordyce's, forces Wollstonecraft's hand and necessitates the analysis which follows. But Wollstonecraft's commentary in the Gregory section is only indirectly concerned with the 'morals and manners of the female world'. Its main function is to question the 'morals and manners' of male writers themselves. Unlike commonplace prescriptions found in conduct literature, including *The Female Reader*, the focus here is not upon the potentially transgressive reading habits of women, nor is it asking women readers to dispense with a particular text, or to learn to skip over dangerous passages. Instead, this is a direct engagement with the authors of these texts and with just those passages which are most 'dangerous' (a term Wollstonecraft reiterates when discussing seductive romance narratives) (*VRW* 4.142).

Irmgard Maassen has noted that Wollstonecraft's argument in *Rights of Woman* goes beyond the typical rhetoric of advice literature for women:

[A] *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* leaves the rhetoric of conduct books behind and inserts the critique of reading into the wider frame of a feminist argument. Educationalist treatises, above all those of the sentimentalist stamp by Rousseau, Fordyce and Gregory, come under attack for the perverted ideal of submissive, irrational womanhood they propound. (176)

I agree that in the critique of Gregory, the focus has shifted from the concern with the vulnerable reader to the dangerous writer. This occurs within a 'wider frame', one which offers a perspective of how cultural ideals are reinforced rather than a concern about women's behaviour within a domestic sphere, one which has already been implicitly cordoned off from a political public. In this sense, Maassen is correct that

*Rights of Woman* exploits the prevalent 'anxiety of reading' at this time, and employs it in the service of a feminist critique. However, Maassen does not specify the literary critical methods Wollstonecraft employs, such as her sophisticated close readings, and, in the case of Gregory, a critique of his authorial self-representation. Just as Gregory attempts to delimit the boundaries of women's public image, Wollstonecraft performs an acute analysis of his own public image.

#### 4.3.3 The Daughterly Reader and the Divided Male Author

Considering what appears to be a confessional tone in Wollstonecraft's opening line in the Gregory critique, in which she declares her 'affectionate respect', it is important to engage with a modern interpretation of Wollstonecraft as submissive reader rather than authoritative critic. There is a tendency in some recent studies of *Rights of Woman* to overemphasize Wollstonecraft's role as recipient and vessel of male discourse. This approach often displaces a deeper analysis of her critical methods. We have seen this in Landes, where the entirety of Wollstonecraft's critical apparatus is contained in the single term 'resistance', with no detailed account of the contours of this resistance (*Public* 129). Instead, Landes offers an extended analysis of the paternal discourse of the eighteenth century as it seems to uncritically reflect in the writing of Wollstonecraft and other women, an approach that has been influential in modern scholarship.

Kathryn Shevelow's work on early conduct manuals argues that female readers of the paternal advice manual, George Savile's *Advice to a Daughter* (1688) being one such manual, were implicated as daughters and were configured to respond in a deferential manner. Landes claims that Rousseau 'interpellated' women readers, determining the outlines of identity through repeated address (67), and Shevelow relies on a similar hypothesis. She sees the unconscious submission of female readers as a 'rhetorical effect based not only on the conduct book's didactic content but also on readers' internalisation of the terms of that content: the authority of the paternal voice' ('Fathers' 109). As we have seen, Shevelow argues that paternalistic texts such as *Advice to a Daughter* prepared the ground for implicit assumptions of male authority for female readers of early periodicals, especially the *Tatler*. Although the

*Tatler* is by no means as authoritarian as Savile's conduct book, Shevelow argues that female readers had already 'internalised' a psychological posture that produced an imbalance of power between the male author and the female reader in this literary form as well ('*Tatler*' 109).

I maintain that a more substantive and detailed analysis of Wollstonecraft's critical approach is now available than in some earlier studies, an analysis which is made possible by not only granting the eighteenth-century woman writer the capability of reading critically, but also by granting her the capability of expressing a resistant reading in a sophisticated form of literary criticism. Vivien Jones's recent study of the influence of conduct book literature upon *Rights of Woman*, one which discusses Gregory at length, itself exhibits a tension between two different approaches to Wollstonecraft's critical writing. Jones first presents a historical view of a complex and interactive field of educative genres that included conduct books, educational treatises, and 'proto-feminist' texts as well. Jones places *Rights of Woman* in the latter category, but argues that some of the elements of advice literature are still present therein. Jones finds in conduct literature, and in *Rights of Woman*, a tension between the potentially liberating connotation of 'education', with its promise of individual self-determination, and the principles of domestic 'duties', with their paternalistic and authoritarian overtones. The subtitle of *Rights of Woman, Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects*, confirms Jones's claim of its connection to the conduct book.

Jones sees Wollstonecraft interrogating the constructions of woman found in advice literature, subjecting 'particular examples to her most explicit critique' ('Advice' 120). However, little more is mentioned about just how that critique proceeds. Instead, Jones reverts to the psychological hypothesis that Wollstonecraft remains susceptible to Gregory's implicit authority, an approach which has affinities with Shevelow's work. Jones perceives Wollstonecraft's role as female *reader* of conduct books, in particular those authored by men, as interfering with her ability to be a *critic* of these texts. Wollstonecraft's reading posture is 'symptomatic of precisely those gendered power relations that the intimate form of address in many conduct books insidiously perpetuates' (Jones 137). The tension between Wollstonecraft's criticism of advice literature and her deferential attitude towards

Gregory is apparently an illustration of the vexed position of the eighteenth-century female reader, even one as resistant as Wollstonecraft.

There is a plausible case for the paternal influence of Gregory upon Wollstonecraft; she apparently displays what might be called a daughterly attitude in her disclaimer when she mentions his 'paternal solicitude' and seems to yearn for a sincere 'father' rather than a calculating 'author' (5.166). However, the intertextual relationship between *Rights of Woman* and *A Father's Legacy* can be established without resorting to a mimetic reading – that is, one without the assumption that *Rights of Woman* reflects Wollstonecraft's feelings about Gregory. Although Wollstonecraft's 'affectionate respect' may very well have been a confession of personal sympathy, her opening lines are also a rhetoric of pre-emption which was typical of the literary reviewer, who would offer formulaic praise before dressing down the author being reviewed. We have seen an instance of this in Chapter 2 of this thesis. The reviewer of *Rights of Woman* in the *Critical Review* begins with some faint praise of Wollstonecraft's 'interesting and well-expressed' complaints about the subjugation of the 'female sex' (cf. 129-30), and then moves on to a thorough rejection of *Rights of Woman* by means of a close reading and incisive quotation practice.

Wollstonecraft's first person declaration at the start should thus be read as a typical form of critical agency rather than a symptom of a daughterly reading. Then, following on from the opening lines, there is a shift in pronoun reference which further consolidates Wollstonecraft's critical authority:

[T]he memory of a beloved wife, diffuses through the whole work, [and] renders it very interesting; yet there is a degree of concise elegance conspicuous in many passages that disturbs this sympathy; and we pop on the author, when we only expected to meet the – father. (5.166).

The instability of 'Gregory' himself has roused Wollstonecraft from a sympathetic and pleasurable reading to a more attentive and critical one. The syntax of this passage dramatizes the rupture of any representation of a private reading. Here, the 'I' of the opening statement, in which Wollstonecraft declares respect for Gregory, has already become the 'we', shifting the authorial persona from solitary female reader to public critic. Joan Mulholland has pointed out that the shifts in agency in



*Rights of Woman* are more a function of Wollstonecraft's rhetoric than any symptom of a divided and fragmented female reader. Mulholland sees this as a necessity when appealing to an increasingly diversified audience, borrowing from Jon Klancher's influential view of the fragmentation of late eighteenth-century reading audiences in *The Making of English Reading Audiences*. In this environment it would be poor strategy to maintain a single authorial role, especially one which employed a rationalist Enlightenment discourse. Men in the audience might respond positively to philosophical deduction, while women would be more receptive to other generic languages and other procedures. As Mulholland states, 'to offer only one form of presentation, a monolithically rational argument, might have resulted in the exclusion of the less experienced, and women readers, as a group within the readership' (183).

Mulholland examines the different functions of Wollstonecraft's 'I' statements, one of which is the idea that Wollstonecraft's personal reactions are presented as only her own, and that therefore the reader may form yet another, independent, opinion:

[T]he explicit declaration of the writer as "I" serves to remind readers that the material they are absorbing has a specific, personal origin, and that it is not to be smoothly merged with their own thinking, as it comes from another's mind. (186-87)

While Mulholland's approach assumes that Wollstonecraft employs a self-conscious rhetorical strategy, it may be too generous to see Wollstonecraft as supportive of a plurality of interpretations. The ensuing critique of Gregory is quite specific in its interpretation, and the shifts in self-reference seem more a means of establishing authority over her antagonist than in offering one reader's opinion among many. There is some evidence of this approach in Wollstonecraft's earlier writing.

In the *Analytical Review* of 1790, Wollstonecraft had referred to 'the pronoun WE' as 'the reviewer's phalanx' (*AnRev* 228; cf. 90). In this review of the second part of Rousseau's *Confessions*, Wollstonecraft rejects 'the reviewer's phalanx' in favour of speaking as a private individual. In the *Analytical Review*, her direct interaction with the text was an example of a 'sympathy' with the author, based on his humanity, but in the critique of Gregory in Chapter 5 of *Rights of Woman* any sympathy is disrupted by the author's own conflicted motives. The reassertion of the

pronoun 'we' implies both an assumption of authority and an exemplary mode of public judgment. When the pronoun 'I' reappears later in the critique, it is no longer Wollstonecraft the private reader, but Wollstonecraft the public, professional reviewer – 'I shall pass over his strictures on religion, because I mean to discuss that subject in a separate chapter'(5.167) – or the indignant moralist who discourages women from adopting Gregory's regime of self-consciousness of their sexuality: 'Wishing to feed the affections with what is now the food of vanity, I would fain persuade my sex to act from simpler principles' (5.169). The different reading postures represented in the critique all aim at establishing Wollstonecraft's literary and therefore moral authority as at least on a par with Gregory's own.

To frame *A Father's Legacy* as consciously literary rather than as a 'sincere' testimonial, that is, to foreground the fragmentation of the authorial persona, is not a reflection of Wollstonecraft's own ambivalence, as Vivien Jones suggests, but is a response to claims of literary authority made by Gregory and by the editor of *A Father's Legacy*. In other words, Wollstonecraft's focus on Gregory's divided self is not a product of creative critical inventiveness, but draws directly from his own claims of wholeness. In the preface, the editor claims that Gregory is whole because he is not conflicted by any desire to please the public:

In such domestic intercourse, no sacrifices are made to prejudices, to customs, to fashionable opinions. Paternal love, paternal care, speak their genuine sentiments, undisguised and unrestrained. (v-vi)

According to the editor, it is 'paternal care' which makes Gregory a trustworthy writer because he is not 'restrained' or 'disguised' behind a pose of literariness. In the role of father, he is able to draw upon intimate knowledge of his daughters and their needs, knowledge 'which would escape the nicest moralist who should undertake the subject on uninterested speculations' (vii). Thus, the preface to *A Father's Legacy* sustains the illusion that an authentic private communication between reader and writer is possible, provided that the writer unfolds himself 'sincerely'.

In examining the authoritative potential of literary self-representation in this period, Habermas points to the specific parameters of the type of private subjectivity on display and the literary form which typically represented it:

In the intimate sphere of the conjugal family privatised individuals viewed themselves [...] as persons capable of entering into “purely human” relations with one another. The literary form of these at the time was the letter. [...] through letter writing the individual unfolded himself in his subjectivity. (48)

In conduct books contemporary with *Rights of Woman*, epistolary form was still an important legitimizing feature. As we have seen in Chapter 2 of this thesis, Catharine Macaulay’s set of lessons is essentially a Socratic dialogue but is entitled *Letters on Education*. In contrast, Maria Edgeworth’s *Letters for Literary Ladies* presents different epistolary styles. The dramatic diction and strong narrative thread of the letters between Thomas Day and Edgeworth’s father are in the style of the epistolary novel (cf. 201). The central lessons of the work, however, are only letters in form, and are essentially sermons.

While the sermonizing portions of such texts departed from the fictionalized interactions between actual correspondents, such as those found in Richardson or Smollett, or indeed the *Gentleman’s Magazine*, the representation of intimacy and of communication between private people continued to legitimize these texts as valid public media. *A Father’s Legacy* presents only the most vestigial epistolary apparatus, opening with the address, ‘My Dear Daughters’, with no date or address to sustain the fiction of an actual letter. The remainder of the text presents no further features of letter form; the work is organized as a set of declarative sermons or lessons, with subtitles, and concludes with ‘The End’, a formula more typical of a self-consciously literary work than a letter.<sup>122</sup> These basic paratextual factors are taken into account when Wollstonecraft claims that *A Father’s Legacy* is intentionally literary and professional rather than intimate and endearingly amateur.

Gregory’s use of epistolary conventions preserves the illusion that he is speaking as a private person to the public, and as such he is apparently ‘undisguised’, as his editor claims.

That the subsequent Letters were written by a tender father, in a declining state of health, for the instruction of his daughters, and not intended for the Public, is a circumstance which will recommend them to every one who considers them in the light of admonition and advice. (17)

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<sup>122</sup> To contrast this with another text which uses vestigial elements of epistolary form, Sarah Scott’s *Millenium Hall* ends with the phrase ‘I am, Sir,’ and then ‘FINIS’, combining two generic formulas.

Continuing to follow Habermas's insight here, we can consider Gregory's persona a reflection of his domestic role, which itself was defined through relationships of power with other members of the 'conjugal' family. The editor claims that this is a work which transcends literariness precisely because 'it is not intended for the Public', but the editor's own language betrays the tension between the illusion of intimacy and the reality of the literary form, sometimes referring to the body of Gregory's text as a set of 'Letters' (17, 19), and elsewhere as a 'Treatise' (21). Gregory also fails to maintain the fiction of being a father rather than an author. In his opening address to his daughters, he refers them to an earlier work of his, 'a little Treatise just published', in order to prove that he considers them with respect and not as 'domestic drudges' (32-33). This is an appeal to his female readers and not to his daughters, who would have by now already known 'the honourable point of view' he holds of 'their sex' (32), and would not need to refer to a printed text to know their father's feelings and thoughts.

From another perspective, Wollstonecraft's attack on Gregory's divided self demonstrates that the representation of the individual subject, grounded in family relations, necessarily displays tensions and contradictions. Mary Jacobus takes issue with Habermas's claim that the subjectivity which arises in the conjugal family, 'by communicating with itself, attained clarity about itself' (qtd. in 277). For Jacobus, this is more a description of the desired potential of the literary public sphere than of what actually occurred. According to Jacobus, there is no 'clarity' of individual subjectivity which allegedly arises through repeated exposure to this type of literary representation. The sharply delineated individual subject is a fiction that never fully convinces (286). Modern theoretical debates aside, Jacobus does not consider whether Wollstonecraft's critiques already examine such a possibility.

Wollstonecraft as critic is able to exploit the tensions inherent in the pose of the private letter-writing author. Earlier women writers, according to Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook, had already taken full advantage of the epistolary form by taking it out of the hands of the male editor. Drawing upon Habermas, Cook points out that the apparent 'privacy' of the epistolary form is what legitimises it in the literary public sphere (9). She sees women writers of this time as able to exploit the practice of inventing women's epistolary selves. When women's letters are 'appropriated,

fragmented and disseminated by male editors', such as in Richardson's *Clarissa*, they do not have the subversive potential of letters known to be published by women themselves (9). Thus, Wollstonecraft the *critic* can comment upon the self-representation of the letter-writing male author, and use the tensions inherent within this posture to open her critique of *his* literary agency, as she does with Gregory and her other antagonists in *Rights of Woman*. Gregory's authority rests upon the notion of an unliterary literature, a 'real' confessional rather than a calculated appeal to the tastes of the public, and it is precisely these grounds that Wollstonecraft questions when she asks whether 'we' are reading the work of a 'father' or an 'author'. Wollstonecraft 'appropriates, fragments, and disseminates' the text of a male writer for the purpose of weakening his ability to deliver prescriptions of female identity, prescriptions which operate under cover of legitimatizations such as 'benevolence', 'solicitude', or the privately-grounded status of 'sincerity'.

Wollstonecraft develops her theme of the divided male author through a form of psychological speculation, an approach made possible by contemporary assumptions of the mimetic nature of texts. As she has done with Milton and Rousseau, this is demonstrated by the use of close reading, allusion, and quotation:

Besides, having two objects in view, he seldom adhered steadily to either, for wishing to make his daughters *amiable*, and fearing lest unhappiness should only be the consequence, of instilling sentiments that might draw them out of the track of common life without enabling them to act with consonant independence and dignity, he checks the natural flow of his thoughts, and neither advises one thing nor the other. (*VRW* 5.166; my emphasis)

Wollstonecraft does not mention the claims of the editor, but substantiates her characterization of a divided Gregory by alluding to specific phrases in the main text of *A Father's Legacy*. With the use of the term 'amiable', Wollstonecraft alludes to passages such as the following:

While I explain to you that system of conduct which I think will tend most to your honour and happiness, I shall, at the same time, endeavour to point out those virtues and accomplishments which render you most respectable and most amiable in the eyes of my own sex. (*Legacy* 34-35)



Wollstonecraft's use of terminology directly from *A Father's Legacy* suggests that the reader of *Rights of Woman* is expected to be familiar with this text, which further confirms its fame and its influence. Wollstonecraft's claim that Gregory has 'two objects in view' could be directly taken from this passage, in which he seems to admit two different aims: the 'happiness' of his daughters and 'at the same time', the aim of making them pleasing to men. Gregory himself makes the distinction between a formative regime which on the one hand attends to the self-expression of individuals, and on the other, is a strategy for building a public image. Wollstonecraft is in a sense highlighting Gregory's own words in order to accuse him of 'rendering' women 'pleasing', a comment which opened her treatment of Gregory and Rousseau earlier in *Rights of Woman* (2.91). Gregory's dual self-representation is a parallel to the double identities he recommends for his daughters.

#### 4.3.4 Gregory's Exclusion of Women from the Public Sphere

Once Gregory's pose of fatherly benevolence has been revealed as false, Wollstonecraft then proceeds to the social doctrine of *A Father's Legacy* and its relevance to one of the central themes of *Rights of Woman*: the political standing of women in society. Gregory, whether author *or* father, reasons in public through the medium of print, while any female voice is formally effaced in the text. The principle of separate and gendered social spheres is explicitly described when Gregory advises his daughters to dissimulate in public, asking them to hide their intelligence and their opinions. Wollstonecraft notes this:

Why, for instance, should the following caution be given when art of every kind must contaminate the mind; [...] with pitiful worldly shifts and sleight-of-hand tricks to gain the applause of gaping tasteless fools? 'Be even cautious in displaying your good sense. It will be thought you assume a superiority over the rest of the company. But if you happen to have any learning, keep it a profound secret, especially from the men, who generally look with a jealous and malignant eye on a woman of great parts, and a cultivated understanding'. (qtd. in *VRW* 5.167-68; *Legacy* 31-32)<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Wollstonecraft prefigures Poovey in pointing to Gregory as an especially powerful example of the doctrine of separate spheres of action, and in fact has contextualized Gregory effectively. Poovey sees

Gregory concedes that the male gaze is a dangerous feature of the public, but recommends complicity. He acknowledges that there are indeed women 'of great parts', but informs his daughters that if they become such women, they must modify their public behaviour to avoid the 'malignant eye' of men.<sup>124</sup> Wollstonecraft immediately identifies the sort of 'company' that Gregory refers to, again employing the term 'phalanx' to indicate faddish conformity:

If men of real merit, as he afterwards observes, be superior to this meanness, where is the necessity that the behaviour of the whole sex should be modulated to please fools, or men, who having little claim to respect as individuals, choose to keep close in their phalanx. (*VRW* 5.168)

Again attempting to use Gregory's own principles against him, Wollstonecraft refers to the following paragraph of *A Father's Legacy*: 'A man of real genius and candour is far superior to this meanness', but even here Gregory recommends only partial sincerity: 'do not be anxious to shew the full extent of your knowledge' (64). If authentic relations are possible between the sexes, argues Wollstonecraft, then there is no need to form the female character in response to the prejudices of an ignorant 'phalanx'. In fact, the accumulated pressure of male expectations distorts the female 'character' itself, and Wollstonecraft parodies Gregory's terminology by recasting it as a musical metaphor:

There would be no end to rules for behaviour, if it be proper always to adopt the tone of the company; for thus, for ever varying the key, a *flat* would often pass for a *natural* note. (*VRW* 5.168)

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Gregory as typical, while Wollstonecraft's comparison of Gregory to Rousseau provides more concrete and local evidence of how gender ideology is disseminated.

<sup>124</sup> The 'caution' which Wollstonecraft identifies was a prevalent bit of advice, as is evident in a letter from Mary Wortley Montagu to her granddaughter:

The second caution to be given her (and which is absolutely necessary) is to conceal whatever learning she attains, with as much solicitude as she would hide crookedness or lameness; the parade of it can only serve to draw on her the envy of, and consequently the most inveterate hatred of all he and she fools [...]. (qtd. in Gilbert and Gubar 204)

Just as Barbauld characterizes women as flowers, a metaphor of passivity, Gregory makes them into mere instruments or singers following a musical score written by men as a collective public. Women's identities are 'modulated' and their voices adopt 'the *tone* of the company', always a semitone away from their true selves, and thus horribly discordant.<sup>125</sup>

Wollstonecraft is ultimately contrasting the current configuration of public opinion, which enforces conformity, with her ideal of a critical public sphere in which individuals can express their uniqueness. Terms which refer to these two models are not consistent throughout the text, but Wollstonecraft usually employs the term 'world' to refer to the former, and 'public' to refer to the latter. In contrast, however, to Habermas's description of the fundamentally rational character of a critical public sphere which is grounded in the family, Wollstonecraft states the following:

Connected with men as daughters, wives, and mothers, their moral character may be estimated by their manner of fulfilling those simple duties; but the end, the grand end of their exertions should be to unfold their own faculties [...]. (VRW 2.95)

As I have argued earlier, Wollstonecraft grounds subjectivity on a religious rather than a relational domestic basis (cf. 106-13), and this passage supports the development of unique individuality distinct from family. In the critique of Gregory, Wollstonecraft also rejects the normatizing force of his 'company'. He attempts to homogenize women's characters by 'banish[ing] all simplicity and variety of character out of the female world' (VRW 5.167). The term 'simplicity' means the unmediated expression of individuality. For Wollstonecraft, the public is still in an unreformed state. Her 'wild wish' to see all 'sexual distinction' banished from society is a critique of a society which is at present highly gendered.

Wollstonecraft does not suggest that the desire for a good reputation can ever be eradicated, but that the basis of public approval could be altered, as we have seen above in her comments on 'countenance', and in the following:

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<sup>125</sup> In 1790, Wollstonecraft had favourably reviewed Dr. Burney's *History of Music* (AnRev 210-212).

Mankind, including every description, wish to be loved and respected by *something*, and the common herd will always take the nearest road to the completion of their wishes. (VRW 4.126)

Wollstonecraft goes on to argue that women are never applauded for their 'great abilities or daring virtues', but only for their 'beauty', that is, eroticized selves (VRW 4.126-27). Wollstonecraft rejects Gregory's advice to comply with the pressures of 'company' which demands submissive harmony:

Surely it would have been wiser to have advised women to improve themselves till they rose above the fumes of vanity; and then to let the public opinion come round – for where are rules of accommodation to stop? (VRW 5.168)

With this statement Wollstonecraft asserts that *A Father's Legacy* addresses women as a group. Just as Gregory has not in actuality presented a personal testament but a public tract on female behaviour, much like the explicit doctrine in *Emile*, Wollstonecraft widens the scope here as well. Now on equal footing with Gregory, and having dispensed with his, and his editor's, claims of disinterested fatherly concern, Wollstonecraft as a political writer can counter Gregory's agenda of caution with an agenda of public activity. As we have seen above, Wollstonecraft's views on women's public roles are specific and aimed at creating a political presence for women. Gregory's daughters are representative of 'the whole sex', and Gregory's tableaux of the larger public 'world'. Wollstonecraft has shifted the perspective from Gregory's imagined genteel spaces to the wider social phenomenon of 'public opinion'.

Wollstonecraft insists that the means by which women are made to submit to the (per)formative pressures of public opinion is precisely the 'distinction of sex', the erotic idealization of the appropriately modest woman, the same ideal which has warped Barbauld's public character. She insists that women are 'rendered' as objects of a specifically erotic gaze. While Wollstonecraft has already made this claim about both Rousseau and Gregory in Chapter 2, here she teases this out of his comments about 'frankness':

Still the same tone occurs; for in another place, after recommending, without sufficiently discriminating delicacy, he adds – 'The men will complain of

your reserve. They will assure you that a franker behaviour would make you more amiable. But, trust me, they are not sincere when they tell you so. I acknowledge that on some occasions it might render you more agreeable as companions, but it would make you less amiable as women: an important distinction, which many of your sex are not aware of.' (5.168-69; *Legacy* 36)

Gregory warns that if his daughters were to abandon their 'reserve', they would lose their 'amiability'. For Wollstonecraft, this is simply code for a passive and fundamentally erotic characteristic:

This desire of being always women, is the very consciousness that degrades the sex. Excepting with a lover, I must repeat with emphasis, a former observation, - it would be well if they were only agreeable or rational companions. (*VRW* 5.169)

Wollstonecraft refers to her 'former observation' that 'distinctions of sex' ought to be erased from society. However, Wollstonecraft seems to agree that even the semblance of flirtation is to be discouraged, and quotes a passage from Gregory to support this view: 'The sentiment, that a woman may allow all innocent freedoms, provided her virtue is secure, is both grossly indelicate and dangerous, and has proved fatal to many of your sex' (*VRW* 5.169; *Legacy* 43-44). Just as she has done with Milton, Wollstonecraft has found a passage which 'coincides' with her opinion and displays self-contradiction in her opponent's text. On the one hand, says Wollstonecraft, Gregory recommends a sexual self-consciousness, and a craven adaptation to the 'tone' of certain social settings. On the other, he recognizes that the seemingly innocent pleasantries that take place between men and women in public are dangerous. Therefore, like Milton, Gregory's 'advice is inconsistent' (*VRW* 5.169).

Wollstonecraft's agreement with Gregory concerning flirtation is part of her doctrine of a de-eroticized society, and not a reiteration of norms of sexual repression, as some commentators have suggested. Barbara Taylor claims that 'the language in which Wollstonecraft talks sex – particularly female sex – is charged with fruity disgust' (*Imagination* 116). Taylor quotes a passage from *Rights of Woman* which seems to confirm this: 'In order to fulfil the duties of life [...] a master and mistress of a family ought not to continue to love each other with passion' (*VRW* 2.99; Taylor 117). Taylor contextualizes this statement amongst prevalent anxieties



concerning the potentially disruptive force of female sexuality, and she cites Mary Poovey's and Cora Kaplan's earlier work to substantiate this view. However, there is a crucial distinction between the blanket injunctions against public expressions of female desire, such as those found in Hester Chapone or in Gregory, and Wollstonecraft's particular account. While Gregory evokes local meeting places in his talk of the 'company', and advises extreme reserve, Wollstonecraft counters this directly with her own version of woman in the public space:

Dr Gregory [...] actually recommends dissimulation, and advises an innocent girl to give the lie to her feelings, and not dance with spirit, when gaiety of heart would make her feet eloquent without making her gestures immodest. (*VRW* 2.97; *Legacy* 93)

For Wollstonecraft, public dance only becomes eroticized by the attentions of Gregory's 'indecent cautions' (*VRW* 2.97). These restrictions extend to the private sphere. Gregory advises women to sustain their husbands' sexual desire by affecting extreme modesty even in an intimate setting. According to Wollstonecraft, 'he earnestly persuades his daughters to conceal' their desire, calling this a 'cautious prudence'. She disagrees with Gregory's notion, 'as if it were indelicate to have the common appetites of human nature' (*VRW* 2.100), not a particularly 'disgusted' view of sexuality. In fact, Wollstonecraft states the physicality and intelligence of the fully developed woman is sexually attractive, mores than the affected frailty of the ideal woman exalted by Gregory or Rousseau.

Besides, the woman who strengthens her body and exercises her mind will, by managing her family and practising various virtues, become the friend, and the not the humble dependent of her husband; and if she, by possessing such substantial qualities, merit his regard, she will not find it necessary to conceal her affection, nor to pretend to an unnatural coldness of constitution to excite her husband's passions. (*VRW* 2.98)

In other words, it is not all eroticism which is perverse, but the artificial attempts to extend it through abstinence and feigned refusal. Moreover, as we have seen above, Wollstonecraft imagines sexual desirability as something properly occurring in a domestic rather than a public setting, where it tends to displace women's civic identity. Wollstonecraft does not want to squelch all expressions of sexuality, but

replaces a 'gallant' or 'gothic' version of femininity with one that allows the 'natural appetites' to run their course. The passage above provides an instructive contrast with Rousseau or Gregory, who pose women as objects of male attention but not as having sexualized 'affection' of their own.

In this instance, Wollstonecraft turns republican discourse against itself, appropriating the classical *male* ideal of physical and intellectual strength for her own ideal of the fully realized woman. The preponderance of authors in *Rights of Woman* who are normally allies to the radical cause are singled out for criticism. Wollstonecraft's theory of sexuality is posed explicitly as a political stance, one that is distinct from her closest associates. Aside from the issue of whether Wollstonecraft's theory of sexuality is liberated in modern terms, in her own context, the explicit politicization of women's public identity is something that is not found in contemporary conduct books, at least not until Hannah More's *Strictures on Female Education*.

#### 4.4 Conclusion

While Wollstonecraft 'enters' the critique of Gregory with seeming deference, her final judgment is unequivocal:

I have already noticed the narrow cautions with respect to duplicity, female softness, delicacy of constitution; for these are the changes which he rings around without ceasing – in a more decorous manner, it is true, than Rousseau; but it all comes home to the same point, and whoever is at the trouble to *analyze* these sentiments, will find the first principles *not quite so delicate* as the superstructure. (VRW 5.169-70; my emphases)

Once the reader is able to see past his 'decorous' language, Gregory has ultimately the same aims as Rousseau – to render women self-conscious of their sexuality, with all the repercussions for their public subjectivity which this entails. If *A Father's Legacy* can be associated with Rousseau and with Fordyce, and is 'not quite so delicate' towards its daughterly audience, then perhaps women are well advised to abandon their 'affectionate respect' just as Wollstonecraft has done, through a literary 'analysis'. The grammar of this passage emphasizes the point that women

readers, like Wollstonecraft, should engage in a critical reading of even the most innocuous texts, as we have seen in the engagement with Barbauld's dedicatory poem. Here, Wollstonecraft's use of the generic pronoun 'whoever' has widened the scope from the 'I' of private, novelized revelation to a discussion amongst a critical public.

Wollstonecraft concludes that Gregory, like Rousseau, inculcates sexual self-consciousness in women not simply because he is personally 'lascivious', as is the case with Fordyce, but because he is complicit with Rousseau's gendered social regime. The rhetoric of ad hominem criticism throughout *Rights of Woman* has been useful in showing that gender ideology will spread *despite* the best intentions and various attitudes of individual authors. Milton is as inspired by a spiritual muse as he claims, but when he describes Eve he is momentarily confounded by his senses. Rousseau is admirable but when he describes the 'pretty foot' of his creation, he is likewise intoxicated and becomes irrational. In fact, his condition could be described as a psychological pathology. The host of male writers between Moses and Milton are generally motivated by a desire to 'subjugate' women and then justify that subjugation through 'invention'. Anna Laetitia Barbauld is generally a 'woman of superior sense' and, apart from the poem at the start of Chapter 4, is quoted in *Rights of Woman* with approval. In a sense, Gregory is the best example of an unconscious reiteration of prevailing norms. This is evident if we synthesize Wollstonecraft's comments in Chapters 2 and 5: 'I respect his heart', but *despite* his good intentions, his text 'comes home' to the same eroticizing of women's public identity as Rousseau's (VRW 2.97; 5.169).

Gregory adopts a Rousseauvian double standard, and Wollstonecraft has already established the presence of this in the older writer, through her deployment of quotations from *Emile* just a few pages before the critique of Gregory:

'We ought not, therefore, to restrain the prattle of girls, in the same manner as we should that of boys, with that severe question, *To what purpose are you talking?* but by another, which is no less difficult to answer, *How will your discourse be received?*' (qtd. in VRW 5.156; *Emile* 376)

Apparently, Rousseau idealizes a public which pressures women to conform to its expectations, and in particular, to its gaze. This version of the public, which

Wollstonecraft terms 'world', and Gregory 'company', with its watchful guardians, is reproduced in the text of the most 'benevolent' of writers. Male writers are themselves divided by the same forces that women are subject to, wanting on the one hand to 'naturally' attend to the best interests of their female children, but needing on the other, to conform to the realities of a gendered society. Wollstonecraft declares that the real John Gregory might have written a better book if only he had resisted the social pressures of 'common life', yet another description of a coercive public rather than a critical one.

While Wollstonecraft implies that the 'father' would have been a welcome author, *Rights of Woman* presents no such positive exemplar of such an author, even though her antagonists – Milton, Rousseau, Samuel Johnson, Barbauld, and Gregory – are among the most 'respected' writers of her time. Thus, the ideal of 'sincere' and unmediated authorship is either a very difficult standard to attain or the 'male authors' who follow Rousseau are inwardly divided simply because they cannot help but be deformed by public pressures. The 'stream of popular opinion' which 'gives a family character to an age' can apparently sweep up most authors (2.90). This view represents a development in Wollstonecraft's thinking from her earlier review of Rousseau's *Confessions* in 1790. In the earlier piece, Wollstonecraft praised *The Confessions* for their direct and unmediated expression of 'a heart that was naked before him [the reader]' (*AnRev* 228), but in *Rights of Woman*, Rousseau's writing is a powerful mediating force, and itself a reflection of Rousseau's own unconscious susceptibility to his environment, as we have seen in Wollstonecraft's hyperbolic claim of the corruption of French culture (cf. 186) Rousseau no longer rises to the ideal of unliterary and transparent authorship.

According to his editor and in his own self-representations, Gregory is impervious to the pressures of the public, and speaks directly 'from the heart' as a father, and so there is no division of his private and public selves. In republican discourse, even as it was modified in the later period, this sort of division within *men* would be labelled as the attitude of the courtier. As we have seen in Chapter 2 of this thesis, Thomas Paine and Richard Price saw their fellow men as divided among themselves, but not *within* themselves (cf. 114-19). As far as women's education is concerned, says Wollstonecraft, there is too much in common between the absolutist culture of Louis XIV, the imagined repressions of the Muslims, Chinese, Russians, Egyptians, and

her enlightened male contemporaries.<sup>126</sup> While these examples are in the context of rhetorical hyperbole, the universality of male desire to dominate women, in its complex manifestation in literary texts, necessitates Wollstonecraft's analysis.

Once the illusion of Gregory's private and paternal motivations is broken, 'sympathy' between the father and the reader is no longer possible. The good Gregory and his commendable volume are opened to searching questions of legitimacy in a public critical arena. Beyond this interaction with a particular text, Wollstonecraft's interaction with Gregory asserts literary authority, a position from which women were already presenting social and political agendas, as we have seen in the writing of Elizabeth Montagu and Clara Reeve (cf. 47-49, 69-73). Wollstonecraft's splicing of small sections of *A Father's Legacy* highlights Gregory's contradictions as well as his unconscious imitation of Rousseau, and substantiates her theory of literary reproduction. Moreover, the methodical demonstration of Gregory's susceptibility to public opinion shows that it is not only women who are susceptible to environmental influences. For Wollstonecraft, the susceptibility of new authors to old is the mechanism by which an ideology of gender, 'a prevailing opinion of a sexual character', is passed on from one generation to the next.

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<sup>126</sup> Louis XIV is mentioned twice in Chapter 4 in order to make the standard republican characterization of absolutist culture as effeminate. Wollstonecraft quotes Adam Smith, in *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, who quotes Voltaire's *Age of Louis XIV* (1751): 'he surpassed all his courtiers in the gracefulness of his shape, and the majestic beauty of his features' (4.128). The alleged Muslim principle that women have no souls appears in the Milton critique, where she complains of the 'Mahometan strain' in *Paradise Lost* (2.88). The allusion to the Chinese practice of foot-binding occurs in the passage from Chapter 3 discussing the physical restrictions upon young girls: 'the limbs and faculties are cramped with worse than Chinese bands' (3.110-11), and the caricature of Russian cruelty occurs in the penultimate paragraph of the text. If woman is indeed essentially inferior to man, then 'it will be expedient to open a fresh trade with Russia for whips: a present which a father should always make to his son-in-law on his wedding day', a comment Wollstonecraft makes at the very conclusion of *Rights of Woman* (13.266).



## General Conclusion

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The consideration of the literary critical aspect of *Rights of Woman* opens new avenues for interpretation, and adds to the ways in which we can study and teach this text. Much of this thesis has been devoted to analysis of the extensive and sophisticated literary critical methodologies in *Rights of Woman*, both in their technical specificity and their relationship to political discourse. *Rights of Woman* contains a great range of literary critical writing, from its more common usage as a form of morally evaluative commentary, to its theoretical application in the assessment of the connections between texts and society, and between texts themselves. This explains both the heterogeneity of Wollstonecraft's work and establishes her purposeful application of available hermeneutic strategies. As Jon Klancher points out, literary criticism was particularly well-placed in this period, and the literary periodical was the 'chief mediator of the republic of letters' (148), a placement which lent it political potential. Accordingly, with much of Wollstonecraft's language and methods drawn from periodical styles, she can forcefully question the social power of centrally placed texts.

Wollstonecraft sees a 'male' tradition of prescriptive writing as a 'gross medium' that stands between women and knowledge, while many intellectual women are characterized as complicit. Accordingly, *Rights of Woman* itself mediates knowledge to women, and through its explicit critical commentary as well as the organization and inclusion of materials, seeks to alter the relationship between readers and texts. The level of heterogeneity and contrast amongst the materials incorporated in *Rights of Woman* encourages a much more iconoclastic reading practice than is implied in most educational literature of the period. In this sense, Wollstonecraft prefigures the aims of modern approaches to a less prescriptive literary education, one which encourages greater autonomy in the reader or student, and greater self-consciousness in the writer. A comparison with the introduction to one modern anthology illustrates this point. *Women in the Eighteenth Century* (1990), edited by Vivien Jones, is a collection of eighteenth-century texts meant for the university student. Its selection from conduct books, treatises, and other writings of the period are organized to reflect the issues that most affected women. One of the aims of this collection is to

present texts which would support a broader understanding of the period amongst students of feminist history. At the end of the introduction, Jones declares that her anthology

extends the revisionary process by offering you the opportunity to make your own rereadings – of ‘literary’ texts, of the texts included here, and of the histories through which they were constructed and, in their turn, help(ed) construct. (12)

Jones turns to address readers directly, a ‘speech act’, to use Joan Mulholland’s terminology (187), which separates the author and reader, and encourages autonomy. The second person singular is not used in *Rights of Woman*, but Wollstonecraft’s shifts between personal revelation and critical professionalism, as we have seen in the critique of Gregory, similarly present a figure whose interpretation is individual. which would allow the effect that Mulholland mentions. Moreover, by reprinting what she considers dangerous texts within the body of *Rights of Woman* rather than expurgating them, Wollstonecraft similarly encourages ‘rereadings’, to use Jones’s term. To be sure, Wollstonecraft intervenes much more frequently than would most modern editors – at the start of the extensive quotations of *Emile* in Chapter 5, she states that Rousseau’s text is too ‘ingenious’ to risk unmediated access, and so Wollstonecraft declares that she must ‘make the application [her]self’. However, in the midst of a particularly long quotation of *Emile*, Wollstonecraft states: ‘I have quoted this passage lest my readers should suspect that I warped the author’s reasoning to support my own arguments’ (*VRW* 5.148). Nevertheless, she shares the goal of a resistant, revisionary reading with her modern counterparts, and like Vivien Jones, encourages the reader to question the literary and social contexts that shape identity.

Recent scholarship has focused on the authoritative roles that can be taken by the woman author in this period. Part of the broadening potential of this scholarship is due to a re-evaluation of the concept of ‘feminism’ itself:

Feminism, after all, has never been a systematic body of ideas but an *advocacy*, taking different forms in different milieux. As such it can be understood only in terms of its speakers and its audiences (actual or imagined), the platforms available to its spokeswomen (and spokesmen), the

media through which their case was argued, and the rhetorical strategies employed. ('Feminism' 262)

Barbara Taylor argues pointedly against what she considers 'interpretive orthodoxies' which she believes have dominated readings of late eighteenth-century women until recently (262). In this thesis, the debates with Mary Poovey, Susan Gubar, Joan Landes, Janet Todd, and Cora Kaplan have not been unequivocal rejections of another way to look at Wollstonecraft. I have striven to synthesize the insights of these earlier studies with a detailed analysis of Wollstonecraft's 'rhetorical strategies', which in many instances prefigure the perspectives taken by these critics.

While modern critics such as Sandra Gilbert apply a Bloomian critique to Wollstonecraft (cf. 118-20), and Poovey selects Gregory as an exemplar of a dominant discourse of gendered and separate social spheres (24; cf. 189), Wollstonecraft prefigures these modes of analysis in her own work, grounding a theory of diachronic ideological reproduction upon Gregory's psychological vulnerability to a powerful set of literary precedents and cultural pressures. It is possible, from a psycho-biographical perspective, that Wollstonecraft's 'affectionate respect' is an expression of her feelings towards an influential male figure, but in examining her critique of Gregory from its rhetorical strengths, Wollstonecraft assumes a familiar reading posture in order to transcend it.

As we have seen, Barbara Taylor, Lawrence E. Klein, Gary Kelly, Betty A. Schellenberg, and Mary Waters, among many others, have advanced an approach to Wollstonecraft and her female contemporaries which grants these writers more self-conscious agency, and sees them employing effective strategies in negotiating the realities of the literary sphere. There needs to be even more work on the specificity of Wollstonecraft's critical methodologies and her literary theory. In her use of quotation, comparison of passages, editing and splicing, and the analysis of genre, agency, and cultural transmission, and especially in her establishment of an authoritative persona, Wollstonecraft employs literary criticism to further a feminist agenda. It is my hope that the current thesis has contributed usefully to an examination of this dimension of Mary Wollstonecraft's writing.

## Appendix A: Concerning the Attribution of *The Female Reader*

The creation of a complete works edition can be a contentious act. It is after all a type of anthology, and as such the organizational schema necessarily influences the judgment of the reader. The effort of many writers to keep particular pieces of their work out of print, or have them relegated to different categories, is evidence enough of the power of such a compilation to form impressions not only of the character of a writer, but of the range of her or his thought, including perceived extremes of social and political thinking. Considering her early death, Wollstonecraft had little control indeed over the final configuration of the writings which became public. For instance, she might never have allowed the letters to Imlay to be published, something Godwin did immediately after her death.<sup>127</sup> These letters draw a compelling narrative trajectory of intense infatuation, erotic euphoria, and suicidal desperation. Wollstonecraft might not have wanted to see a corpus of educational and political writing constantly measured against the tale of her most vulnerable self. Although authorial subjectivity in this period is idealized as intimate and anti-public, it is doubtful that the Wollstonecraft sketched by Godwin is the one that Wollstonecraft herself would have wanted to present.

In fact, it is Godwin's Wollstonecraft that has come down to us, and it is this Wollstonecraft which plays counterpoint to her explicitly political texts. Her love affair with Gilbert Imlay is at the heart of what was most gripping and most damning about William Godwin's *Memoirs*, and has continued to be part of many full-length studies of Wollstonecraft until very recently. My aim here is to question the attribution of an item that has received much less attention than the letters to Imlay. This item has not raised the same hopes of looking into this author's psychology, and of judging the effects of powerful sexual norms working upon the most prominent feminist of the time. An anthology titled *The Female Reader*, if it is indeed edited by Wollstonecraft, along with a preface attributed to her, alters the complete works in significant ways, not least because its prescriptions of women's public behaviour are further from *Rights of Woman* than any other text in the opus. If we did not have the

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<sup>127</sup> William Godwin first publishes these in *Posthumous Works of Mary Wollstonecraft* (1798).

letters to Imlay, *The Female Reader* would perhaps fill the function of counterpoint to *Rights of Woman*.

*The Female Reader*, published in 1789 by Joseph Johnson, is an anthology of proverbs, verse, dramatic literature, and prayers that is designed to improve the 'elocution' of women. The title page reads 'Miscellaneous Pieces in prose and verse', 'selected' by a 'Mr. Cresswick, teacher of elocution'. The standard modern attribution rests primarily on a line in William Godwin's *Memoirs*, and another line in a letter by Joseph Johnson, both quoted below. These sources state that Wollstonecraft compiled this anthology and added some material of her own, which consists of the following: three passages quoted from her earlier conduct book, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787), which are signed M. WOLLSTONECRAFT (*Reader* 120-21; 326; 326); four prayers in uninterrupted order inserted towards the end of the anthology, signed 'O' (339-42); three extracts from her moralist educational tract, *Original Stories* (1788), signed 'Original Stories' (*Reader* 119-20; 276-77; 337-38); the Preface to the work, which is unsigned and with no gendered pronoun reference (55-60).

My hypothesis is that Wollstonecraft may have been involved in the production of *The Female Reader*, and may have contributed some material, but did not have complete control over the selection of material. In fact, I suggest that she was called in to complete a job that was begun by 'Mr. Cresswick', the editor named on the title page. It is the aim of the following pages to question some of the evidence supporting the currently accepted attribution of *The Female Reader* to Wollstonecraft as editor of the selections, and as author of the Preface. A cursory look at the title page suggests that the preface was written by a separate hand, an impression that is strengthened by some comments in a review of the work in 1789. Wollstonecraft may have done one or neither of the two tasks, but not both.

*The Female Reader* attracted no negative periodical commentary at the time of its publication, and is not mentioned in later critical attacks upon Wollstonecraft in the late 1790s by her reactionary foes. If *Rights of Woman* can be seen as being received without alarm in 1792, according to Regina Janes, then the lack of negative reception of *The Female Reader* must confirm its conventionality even more. In fact, there are some elements which can be plausibly associated with modern assessments of Wollstonecraft's thinking, and many others which do not. *The Female Reader*, with



its many references to dress, religious practice, norms of female propriety, and warnings about neglecting domestic duties, can be easily placed within the general category of advice literature for women, but its organization differs somewhat from collections of more homogenous materials.

Three examples of such collections have been examined in this thesis, Richard Steele's *Lady's Library*, Eliza Haywood's *Female Spectator*, and Henrietta Colebrook's *Beauties of Rousseau*. These very different collections select materials from within a narrow range. Steele's collection draws heavily on Anglican divines, Haywood's pieces are almost stylistically identical to her own post-Restoration romance narratives, and Colebrook naturally draws from a single writer, further culling only the most 'beautiful' and least 'dangerous' to female 'virtue'. *The Female Reader*'s goal of improving speech necessarily opens its generic range. It presents texts whose length and style is designed to follow a trajectory of increasing demands on memory and on range of expression. In fact, the Preface claims that not all of the works are 'beautiful', because that would be too forbidding: '[M]any dialogues have been selected; but not always the most beautiful with respect to composition, as the taste should very gradually be formed' (56). The idea is to exercise the young student and not have her stand in awe of an unattainable standard of expression. Thus, the first section, entitled 'Select Desultory Thoughts', contains dozens of brief aphorisms and proverbs, which are apparently less serious, taxing, and tasteful than what is to come.

The model for *The Female Reader* is William Enfield's *Speaker*, meant for the use of young male students at the Dissenting academies in which Enfield lectured.<sup>128</sup> The pragmatic rather than the purely didactic aim of the later work is drawn from Enfield's collection, as the Preface announces:

Before the publication of Dr. ENFIELD'S SPEAKER, a methodical order in the arrangement of pieces selected was not attempted, or even thought of, though it is evidently the only way to render a book of this kind extensively

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<sup>128</sup> Although both anthologies' stated aim is to improve 'elocution', the longer passages of the *Speaker* and the presence of a section titled 'Argumentative Pieces' suggests that the selections were discussed, rather than simply digested by male students. This is in contrast to the suggested technique of memorization in the preface to *The Female Reader* (58-59). As Isaac Kramnick has pointed out, the (all-male) Dissenting academy encouraged an iconoclastic view of literary and intellectual 'prejudice'. William Enfield (1740-87) was, like Priestley and Price, a popular itinerant lecturer (50).

useful; as whatever tends to impress habits of order on the expanding mind may be reckoned the most beneficial part of education. (*Reader* 55)

Therefore, *The Female Reader*, 'intended for the improvement of females', promises that its 'subjects are not only arranged in separate books, but are carefully disposed in a series that tends to make them illustrate each other' (55).

The mention of *The Speaker* is meant as an endorsement for this new collection, which is indeed patterned very closely upon its predecessor, at least in its general organization. *The Speaker* is among a number of other texts in the genre of improving public speaking, such as Thomas Sheridan's *British Education* (1756) and James Burgh's *Art of Speaking* (1761). Joseph Johnson published the first edition of Enfield's work in 1774, and a sequel appears in 1780, along with many new extracts organized under the same subheadings. Subsequent editions of both were published until the end of the century. The gendering of the two anthologies is obvious in the titles, but also in the manner of organizing content. The table of contents of both *The Female Reader* and *The Speaker* begin with two sections entitled 'Narrative Pieces' and 'Didactic Pieces', and both have a section later in the collection called 'Descriptive Pieces'. The key difference is that *The Female Reader* contains no counterpart to the sections of *The Speaker* titled 'Argumentative Pieces' and 'Opinions and Harangues'. In short, *The Female Speaker* teaches speech, but not public speech. The Preface confirms this:

Females are not educated to become public speakers or players; though many young ladies are now led by fashion to exhibit their persons on a stage, sacrificing to mere vanity that diffidence and reserve which characterizes youth, and is the most graceful ornament of the sex. (*Reader* 55-56)

The allusion to actresses seems to be a pre-emption of the disapproval that would normally arise at the idea of teaching women to speak well. This passage reflects Rousseau's equation of public literary women with women involved in the theatre. Even so, the writer of the Preface insists that reading for women is useful, even while reasserting the impropriety of turning these skills to public use:

But if it be allowed to be a breach of modesty for a woman to obtrude her person or her talents on the public when necessity does not justify and spur

her on, yet to be able to read with propriety is certainly a very desirable attainment. (*Reader* 56)

At this point, many other eighteenth-century texts would state that the purpose of educating women is to make them better companions for their husbands. Instead, the Preface gives as its primary purpose the inculcation of independent moral and religious 'lessons' while developing the 'taste'. These principles identify the work as an example of Dissenting writing, which sees the development of individual religious belief as the grounding for all other forms of social and political subjectivity, as I have argued in Chapter 2. Thus, it is admittedly possible that Wollstonecraft wrote this preface, considering that themes such as individual spiritual development, the attack on superficial public images, and the importance of critical reading recur in *Rights of Woman*.

However, given where Wollstonecraft stood along a spectrum of feminist thought even at this early date, there are other substantive elements which make the attribution of *The Female Reader* questionable. The first of these is the idea that opinions and acquired learning need not take the form of speech, but can be read in the face:

But it is not necessary to speak to display mental charms. The eye will quickly inform us if an active soul resides within; and a blush is far more eloquent than the best turned period. (*Reader* 59)

The utter passivity of this model is near paraphrase of John Gregory's comment that 'one may take a share in conversation without uttering a syllable', excerpted in the body of the anthology (75). Another extract reinforces a particularly authoritarian model of marriage. Colley Cibber's play, *The Provoked Husband*, focuses on a wife who exasperates her husband by wasting money. The good man has no choice but to separate. Realizing the error of her ways, the wife makes tearful apologies and they re-unite (*Reader* 229-33). After several dramatic pieces from earlier in the century and soon after this selection, Milton is quoted to support the principle of wifely obedience. At one point, Eve states, 'God is thy law, thou mine; to know no more / Is woman's happiest knowledge and her praise.' (qtd. in *Reader* 263). This is precisely the political point, and from the identical passage, that Wollstonecraft so vehemently

opposes in *Rights of Woman*. Another author who appears in *The Female Reader* and then is castigated in *Rights of Woman* is Anna Laetitia Barbauld. Here there is apparently no problem with gendering women as weak and 'fair':

Oh! born to soothe distress, and lighten care;  
Lively as soft, and innocent as fair  
(*Female Reader* 304; Barbauld, *Poems* 49)

These lines from the 'Characters' poems in Barbauld's first collection (1773) parallel very closely the quotation in Chapter 4 of *Rights of Woman*, also a piece of verse by Barbauld, and also taken from the 1773 collection. Like 'To a Lady, with painted Flowers', this celebrates the feminine ideal of vulnerability and women's role as soothers of men. It is as if *Rights of Woman* overturns precisely those authors who were quoted so approvingly in *The Female Reader*.

The first and as yet the only complete works of Wollstonecraft was published in 1989 by Chatto and Pickering in Britain, and New York University Press in the United States, edited by Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler. This includes not only material published in Wollstonecraft's lifetime but also the posthumous and unfinished texts published by Godwin in 1788, as well as most of the reviews. By 1989 the provenance of most of these had been long established. The only full-length published text which was still questionable was *The Female Reader*. The brief note offered by the editors of the complete works sums up the evidence, which consists of two single sentences, one from William Godwin and one from Joseph Johnson.

Mary Wollstonecraft's anthology appeared in a single edition in her lifetime; its true author is known from Godwin, *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1798), ch. 5: 'she compiled a series of extracts in verse and prose, upon the model of Dr. Enfield's Speaker, which bears the title of *The Female Reader*; but which, from a cause not worth mentioning, has hitherto been printed with a different name in the title-page.' In a manuscript note quoted by Charles Kegan Paul, *William Godwin: his friends and contemporaries* (1876), I, 193, Joseph Johnson states that she 'compiled the French Reader, introducing some original pieces and prefixed a preface to it'. This preface, three excerpts from *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787) [...] and four prayers [...] are all signed 'O'. (Todd and Butler, *Works* IV.52)

The second piece of evidence, instead of being drawn from Johnson's papers, is given by way of Kegan Paul, who actually misquotes the original statement by Johnson which refers to the anthology as 'the Female Reader' and not the *French* reader. Johnson's statement is in a document entitled, 'A Few Facts', and is currently among the unpublished Lord Abinger manuscripts, at the Pforzheimer collection of the New York Public Library. 'A Few Facts' is now available as transcribed by Pamela Clemit in a new edition of Godwin's *Memoirs* (132-33), and in *Shelley and his Circle*, edited by Kenneth Neill Cameron (I.65).

The modern scholar who first definitively attributes *The Female Reader* to Wollstonecraft relies on these two pieces of evidence. Moira Ferguson's pioneering article in *Signs* gives both the passage from Godwin's *Memoirs* and Johnson's 'A Few Facts', slightly misquoting the former passage.<sup>129</sup> While these are seemingly strong pieces of evidence, they are not two separate and independent proofs, but in actuality only one. It seems clear that 'A Few Facts' was written in response to a request from Godwin for more information about Wollstonecraft's publications. This is borne out by the date of this manuscript, 15 September, only five days after Wollstonecraft's death, and likely Johnson is prompted by no other reason than a request from Godwin. As Cameron documents, relying upon Godwin's daily journal entries, Johnson visited Godwin on 12 September and 23 September, and on the 24<sup>th</sup> there is already hard evidence that the *Memoirs* are underway (1:197, 200). The assiduous editors of the Broadview edition of Godwin's *Memoirs*, Gina Luria Walker and Pamela Clemit, who had access to Johnson's original MS, note that 'Godwin's account of this period of Wollstonecraft's life [1787-1790] is based on Johnson's "A Few Facts"' (n.67).<sup>130</sup> Moreover, Cameron confirms that 'Johnson wrote out [this information] for Godwin' (1:65). If this is so, then Godwin's statement that she 'compiled a series of extracts in verse and prose' is not based on his personal and independent knowledge of Wollstonecraft's editorship of *The Female Reader*, but on

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<sup>129</sup> Godwin writes that Wollstonecraft compiled selections 'in verse and prose', while *Signs* quotes this passage with the wrong preposition, 'on verse and prose' (947).

<sup>130</sup> A transcription of Johnson's note is also available in *Shelley and his Circle: 1773-1822*, I.65, but there are some slight differences between this transcription and that of Walker and Clemit. In addition, the full text is not included, as it is in the Walker and Clemit.



Johnson's single phrase in his letter. Therefore, it is Johnson's phrase which is the sole independent source upon which the attribution rests.

While Johnson may very well be giving accurate information here, his short manuscript is not wholly accurate in other regards. He states that Wollstonecraft wrote *Rights of Woman* while living at George Street: 'Here she wrote the Rights of Woman, Mary, Original Stories', etc. However, Mary Wollstonecraft moved out of the house on George Street on 'Michaelmas 1791' (29 September), as Johnson states, and which she confirms in a letter to William Roscoe (203). This was one of the divisions of the fiscal year, upon which leases and tenancies were begun and ended (*OED*). It is in this same letter, dated 6 October, that she states she is in the process of composing *Rights of Woman*, which, therefore, was written in her new house, on Store Street, Bedford Square. This demonstrates that Johnson's letter is not unimpeachable.

It is significant to compare another issue of attribution which relies upon the same source, and note whether scholars have been satisfied in that case. In discussing the attribution of 221 of the reviews for the *Analytical Review*, Sally N. Stewart provides the most detailed study of this problem, along with a synthesis of older studies.<sup>131</sup> She notes that Joseph Johnson had stated that Wollstonecraft 'wrote many articles in the *Analytical*' ('A Few Facts' 162). But in the extensive literature on the attribution of the reviews, Johnson's word had not been enough to quell the many questions concerning the reviews. Much work has been done before the current conclusion that the reviews by Wollstonecraft are usually those which were signed 'M', 'W', or 'T', and number approximately 220 (Stewart 187). This sort of assiduous vetting of sources has not been undertaken in the case of *The Female Reader*.

A minor but curious point in Todd and Butler's comment is the contradiction of their own edition when they state that 'all' of the material allegedly authored by Wollstonecraft is signed 'O'. Actually, the excerpts from her earlier conduct book, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, are signed 'M. WOLLSTONECRAFT', and three from *Original Stories* are identified as such (something not noted in the Prefatory Note). Excerpts from *Thoughts* also appear in another anthology attributed to Cresswick, *The Lady's Preceptor* (1792), whose attribution has not been

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<sup>131</sup>Mitzi Myers states, in 2002, that Stewart's study remains the definitive account of the attribution of the reviews.

challenged. If Cresswick had a partial hand in the compilation of *The Female Reader*, then the presence of materials from Wollstonecraft's *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* can be accounted for by Cresswick's practice of including Wollstonecraft in his anthologies rather than by Wollstonecraft's involvement as editor. In fact, as Vivien Jones explains, *Thoughts* was quoted, anthologized, and pirated often at this time ('Advice' 129). Thus, the addition of these particular extracts would not be unusual in a contemporary anthology, and especially one published by Joseph Johnson, whether or not Wollstonecraft was the editor.

One possible reason that Wollstonecraft's supposed authorship remained undetected for some two hundred years was that the anthology quickly went out of print. According to Damon Hickey, among the first to bring up the issue of attribution, by 1971 only a single copy of the work was known (128), but by 1975, he locates one more copy at Vassar, and a Dublin edition at the University of Texas (129). All of these bear the name of 'Mr. Cresswick'. Aside from the two pieces of evidence cited by Todd and Butler, there was nothing to contradict the title page. In fact, another important contemporary source confirms Cresswick's editorship, that is, the *Analytical Review* of 1789, published by Joseph Johnson. (4:224-25). I quote extensively from the review for two reasons. First, because I have not yet seen it reprinted or quoted anywhere in Wollstonecraft commentary, and second, because some of the phrases seem so close to the wording of the Preface of *The Female Reader* that the review may have been written by Wollstonecraft herself.<sup>132</sup> In this case, it would mean that in June of 1789, she is not contesting the editorship of Mr. Cresswick, whose name appears at the head of the following review:

This selection is formed with diligence and taste. It abounds with much more variety than other books of the same sort, and contains many elegant extracts that have not been hackneyed by less industrious compilers.

[quoting from the Preface of *The Female Reader*].

The editor has admitted scarcely any pieces that are in Dr. Enfield's Speaker, and the Sequel to it, as those publications are generally diffused. The work is, in every respect, well calculated for ladies' schools; and to them, as well as to parents and governesses in general, we sincerely recommend it.

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<sup>132</sup> It was common practice for an author to review his or her own work, as we have seen in the case of Kenrick's translation of *Emile*.

The preface abounds with practical instructions, which though obvious and important, we do not remember to have seen elsewhere, and forms a very valuable introduction to the whole. There are, also, some excellent original prayers, which discover the finest sensibilities of piety, supported by that energy of sentiment, which prevents them from degenerating into weakness or folly. They are such as Christians of every denomination may join in with interest and fervour; and they are such as every virtuous mind may address to the all gracious Father with an humble confidence of being heard. We suppose that these and the preface were furnished by some friend, as they are signed O. H.

(*Analytical Review* 4:224-25)

This review acknowledges the popularity of Enfield's *Speaker*, and the last paragraph singles out Wollstonecraft for special praise. It is most likely that 'H' is another writer or Johnson himself.

The statement that these materials were furnished by 'some friend' suggests that if Wollstonecraft wrote the Preface, then she was called in to do so after most of the anthology had already been selected and organized. This was likely done by Johnson himself, who only needed to follow the pattern of *The Speaker*, and fill the sections with material he already owned, as he had done with the second version of *The Speaker*, its 'sequel'. Barbara Benedict notes that the practice of reprinting remaindered text was common: 'Some printers or booksellers awash in unsold copies of unpopular works were mainly assemblers, cobbling together pamphlets that happened to be available' ('Anthology' 247). We might also consider the fact that Johnson published with great speed. It is conceivable that if the work was half-finished, and Wollstonecraft came to the project late, he would not have asked her to completely reorganize the selections. Moreover, the letters from this period suggest that at this point in her career, Wollstonecraft's relationship with Johnson was still that of a grateful beneficiary of his offers of work. In 1788 she writes, 'Remember you are to settle my account, as I want to know how much I am in your debt' (*Letters* 177). At the same time, the letters from this period suggest that she had some involvement with this anthology, as she requests a copy of *The Speaker* in July 1788 (179).

Wollstonecraft never claimed association with this work in her lifetime. Unlike most of her other works, *The Female Reader* is not mentioned in her letters (Index, *Letters* 438-39). A teleological approach to the opus has had to account for this

apparent change of perspective with either an assumption of transcendental revelation brought on by the French Revolution, or a narrative of momentous 'development' of Wollstonecraft's feminist sensibilities. This would have had to occur in little more than two years. *The Female Reader* was written in mid-1789, judging by its publication at the end of that year, and *Rights of Woman* was written in the autumn of 1791. Indeed, the scholar who announced the 'discovery' of *The Female Reader* in 1978 makes exactly these two assumptions. Moira Ferguson refers repeatedly to a pre-Revolutionary Wollstonecraft:

Explicitly laid bare is the central tension in her early works between her conviction that women must be educated and her acceptance, before the French Revolution, of a social view of women that affirmed and perpetuated their subjugation. ('Discovery' 945)

In a later article, Ferguson describes the obvious differences between *The Female Reader* and *Rights of Woman* in terms of political evolution: 'Wollstonecraft had moved beyond such a circumscribed view of females by 1792' ('Cresswick' 468).

Likewise, Alan Richardson relies upon *The Female Reader* to support his view of Wollstonecraft's political evolution:

In *The Female Reader* Wollstonecraft had recommended "diffidence and reserve" as the "most graceful ornament of the sex," praising the modest blush as "more eloquent than the best turned period" [FR 4:56, 59]. There is no longer a place in Wollstonecraft's thought for such temporizing. "I here throw down my gauntlet, and deny the existence of sexual virtues, not excepting modesty" [VRW 5:120]. (Richardson 33, citing *The Female Reader* and *Rights of Woman*)

That all of Wollstonecraft's work exhibits a tension between calls for women's social and economic autonomy and some form of companionate marriage is obvious. Yet this tension has been accounted for without recourse to the idea that the French Revolution altered the perceptions of Wollstonecraft's associates. Vivien Jones, who expressly opposes a teleological reading of Wollstonecraft's opus, sees tensions between domesticity and female autonomy pervading educational writing in general, and thus inevitably recur in *Rights of Woman*, which 'still bears more than a passing

resemblance to the genre' ('Advice' 119).<sup>133</sup> However, even if these tensions are inevitable, the inclusion of *The Female Reader* in Wollstonecraft's opus means that the gulf between the emancipatory and the quietist elements is much deeper and wider than would otherwise be the case.

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<sup>133</sup> Jones is quite clear on avoiding developmental models in assessing Wollstonecraft's works: 'One temptation is to [...] look for moments of radicalism which appear to anticipate the two *Vindications*' ('Advice' 122).



*J. H. L.*  
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